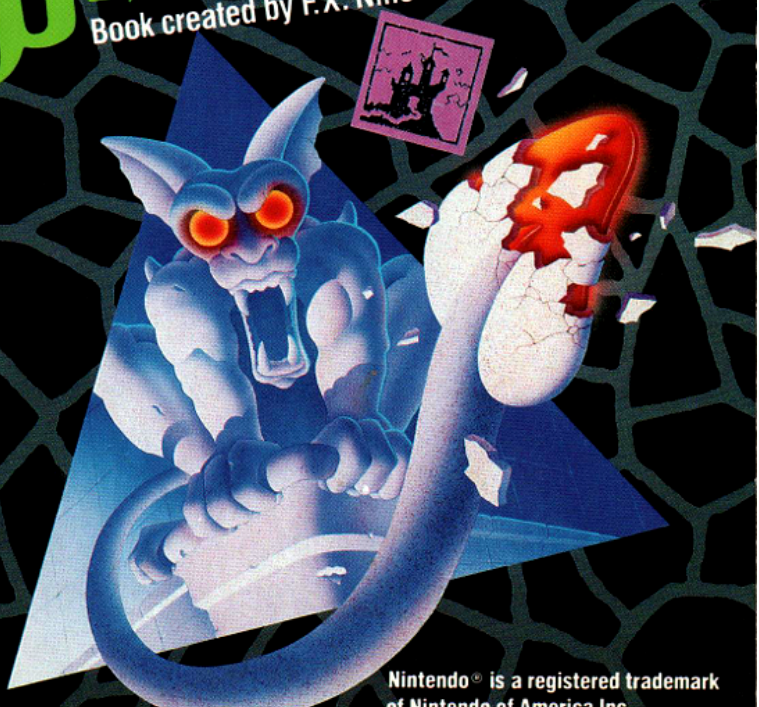
WORLDS OF POWER™

The exciting prequel to Shadowgate,™ the NINTENDO® game created by ICOM.

Before Shadowgate™

Book created by F.X. Nine



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SCHOLASTIC

The ax was about to fall…

The spirit lifted a hand and pointed a long finger at Jairen.

"Your quest is over!" it said, in a voice filled with doom. A bolt of lightning cracked from the figure's hand, and Jairen ducked.

"Foolish manling," sneered the spirit, "you have brought your own death!"

A huge, shining battle-ax appeared in the air, swinging side to side. No hand held it, yet it moved without stopping, closer and closer to Jairen's head.

WORLDS OF POWER

Book #8

Before Shadowgate

by F. X. Nine

Danger awaits…

The world is suffering from a horrible wickedness: An evil king rules Shadowgate, and the poison is sure to spread across the land… unless an orphan boy named Jairen can defeat him. You are Jairen, and the future is up to you.

The wizard Lakmir teaches you to make weapons of fire, and the warrior Hawk trains you to wield sword and scimitar. Are you prepared to challenge the goblins, orcs, and other terrifying creatures that stand between you and the evil king who dwells at Shadowgate?

The exciting prequel to Shadowgate™, the Nintendo® action-adventure game — with loads of game-solving hints throughout.

Before Shadowgate

The exciting prequel to the game created by ICOM Simulations, Inc.

Book created by F.X. Nine

Written by Ellen Miles

Based on story line and characters created by David R. Marsh & Karl A. Roelofs

A Seth Godin Production

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RetroReadingTime.com

For Greg Hoch

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Prologue

“Traal-face,Traal-face!” The jeering pack of boys chased Jairen down the dusty road. “That's right, orphan boy!” yelled the biggest of them. “Run fast. Go and hide your ugly Traal-face!”

Jairen tried to shut his mind to their taunts, but it was no use. After all, they were right! He *was* an orphan boy. And it was true that the birthmark on his right cheek looked almost exactly like the silhouette of Traal, the fifth moon. Traal hung in the evening sky, always a crescent, never showing its full face as the other moons did.

Jairen had always hated that mark. It made him feel different. As long as he carried the mark, he thought, he'd be an outsider — one who didn't belong. But even though Jairen believed their teasing, the boys who tormented him with their cruel words were wrong. The boy with the “Traal-face” was not ugly.

Jairen was slight, it was true. He did not have the strong arms and muscular legs of the leader of his tormentors. But his blue eyes shone clear and bright, and his hair was a golden flag in the wind. Only the birthmark marred his pleasing features.

Now, though, his eyes were bright with stifled tears. How he hated to be teased and chased! If only he could turn and face the crowd of boys — if only he weren't so timid.

“Pay them no mind, boy!” thundered a voice from somewhere near. It was Thurl, the smithy with whom Jairen lived. The boy whirled and saw that he had arrived at Thurl's shop without even noticing. “Come, come,” said Thurl. “I need you now, to keep my fire high.” The huge man frowned at the boys who had been chasing Jairen. “Be off with you,” he said. “Before I show you the back of my hand.”

The boys scattered, and Jairen joined Thurl inside the hot, noisy shop. It was darker inside than out, and for a moment Jairen thought he might let out the tears he'd been holding back. But Thurl gave him no time for weeping. “The bellows, boy. Take them up and pump them for me while I hammer the dents from this shield.”

Jairen wiped at his eyes, cursing the weakness of spirit that made them moist. And then he picked up the huge bellows, made of leather bound with brass, and cursed yet again, this time at the weakness of his small body. He knew that Thurl would never have chosen him for an apprentice, and yet here he was, destined to learn the trade of the smithy. And only because Thurl had been kind enough not to turn his back on an orphan boy, so many years before.

Jairen had lived with Thurl ever since his old aunt Delma had passed to the Next Land. Sweet, loving Delma, who had cared for him after his parents' death. Jairen still missed her mightily at times. And his parents? Did he miss them? Only in the most general way. After all, he barely remembered them. He had fifteen summers now, and he'd lost his parents when he had had but five.

At times, most often when he was between waking and sleeping, the mists of memory would part enough for him to feel the soft, warm presence that was his mother. Or he'd sense his father, standing tall and strong beside him. At those times, he felt less an orphan. But as he grew those times came less often, and he knew more and more surely that he was alone on the planet Tyragon. Alone, and cursed with the birthmark that set him apart from all others.

“Pump, boy!” shouted the smithy. “My fire grows cool while you dream.” Jairen shook his head and went back to working the gigantic bellows as best he could. He knew well that he had no right to complain about the life he led. Thurl was kind, though stem, and he was always fair. He was teaching Jairen a trade, and he would most likely bequeath his small shop to the boy.

Jairen would live out his days as a smithy in the town of Wooddale, in the country Kal Torlin. He would never see the wonders he'd heard tales of all his life. The wild lands and creatures of Kal Tarkus, and of the other continents on the huge world that was Tyragon, would never know his footstep.

Jairen shrugged and pumped the bellows. His life was what it was, and he was lucky to have it. Delma had often told him that though his parents had been murdered, he had been spared “for a reason, lad. For a reason.” That reason must have been that the town of Wooddale would always need a smithy, thought Jairen,

smiling ruefully as he pumped the air that fed the leaping flames.

Chapter One

“But — but I'm not sure I know how yet!” said Jairen. He had been alone at the shop (Thurl having errands in town) when the tall gray-bearded stranger rode up on his half-lame mount.

“Not know how to shoe a horse?” asked the stranger, staring at Jairen with piercing gray eyes. He tightened his grip on the huge staff he carried. “But it's the first thing an apprentice is taught!”

“It's true, I have been taught to do it,” said Jairen. “But I have never done it alone. If you wait just until evening, I'm sure Thurl —”

“I cannot wait! I have business in the Western Forest,” said the old man, his eyes flashing. “You have the look of a boy who can do what he sets his mind to do. And I want you to set your mind to shoeing my horse.” He paused, and then went on, sounding more kind now. “My mare is gentle, and a good one to practice on. If you cannot shoe her, I must ride her anyway, lame as she is.”

Jairen felt sorry for the animal that stood calmly in the yard. He knew enough about horses to know that walking without a shoe would be hard on her. He clucked his tongue, calling her to his side. She was a lovely mare, of softest gray touched with white. He lifted her hoof and inspected it.

“All right,” he said. “I'll do my best.” The stranger nodded, as though he'd never expected any less. Then he shrugged off his black traveling cloak and, still holding his great staff, sat down on the great tree stump in the shop yard, ready to wait while Jairen “practiced” on his mare.

Jairen took the bellows and pumped with all his might, until the fire blazed. Next, he hammered out a shoe, checking the fit against the mare's hoof until it seemed perfect. When the shoe was ready, he asked the stranger's help in steadying his mount. “I'll get the shoe nailed on, if you'll just hold her head,” he said. “She seems calm, but I've seen too many horses bolt to trust her completely.”

The man nodded and came to hold his mount. Soon, Jairen let

the hoof drop to the ground. “Done!” he said, dusting off his hands.

“And done well,” said the stranger. “As I knew it would be.” He put his foot through the stirrup and lofted into the saddle. Then, seated, he reached into a small leather bag tied at his waist. He tossed a shining gold coin to Jairen. “That's for you, boy-and just for you. Thurl never need know I was here.”

The coin felt heavy in Jairen's hand. “I can't take this,” he said. “This is half a darius! Enough to live on for months.”

But the stranger would have none of Jairen's refusal. “It's yours, boy. You earned it. Now, fetch me my staff and I'll be off.”

Jairen looked around and saw that the staff had been left by the stump. He tucked the shining coin into the pocket of his tunic and ran to do the stranger's bidding. Jairen picked up the staff, intending to hurry back to where the man sat waiting, high on his horse.

But the moment he touched the staff, Jairen forgot everything. Suddenly, there was no man, no horse, no stump, no yard. The shop was gone, with its hot fire and creaking bellows. Jairen's head was full of whirling images: Stars and moons (one that looked like the Traal-mark on his cheek) circled as he staggered, dizzy and confused.

And then the whirling slowed and stopped. Jairen stood at the far end of a great hall, a cavernous, echoing place that seemed to stretch forever into the distance. At first Jairen thought that hundreds of guards stood, perfectly still, along the walls of the hall. But as he looked more closely he saw that the “guards” were statues.

He walked closer to the one nearest him, and saw right away that it was a statue of a great and noble man. The face was strong, with eyes that seemed almost alive. The statue stood tall — much taller than any man Jairen had met. Jairen stepped back in awe. Had there once been a living, breathing man who looked like this? Then he saw the nameplate that was fixed to the statue's base. KING TORLIN, it said in golden letters that seemed to pulse as Jairen read them. King Torlin! Why, he was the first king of Kal Torlin, thought Jairen. This very land is named for him.

Jairen gazed again at the fine face of the ancient king. For a moment, it seemed as though the statue's eyes met his own, and Jairen froze. But then the moment passed, and Jairen began to walk down the length of the great hall.

There were hundreds of statues. All of the Great Kings that Jairen had ever heard of were there, as well as many he'd never known about.

King Torval the Kind. King Rolka the Generous. King Polvor the Brave. Jairen stopped as he reached each statue, and stared hard at each noble face. He felt, somehow, that there was something he was supposed to learn in this great hall. Was it just a history lesson? Or was there something more?

He walked, and stopped, and looked for what seemed like hours, his footsteps echoing in the huge empty hall. Finally he came to the last statue. But there was something odd about this one! This statue was as tall as the rest, and the body looked as fit and strong as the bodies of all the other kings. But this last statue was not complete. It had no face.

Jairen drew closer. It was true. There was no fine, strong nose. There were no hawklike eyes. And, while all the other statues had had mouths that were gentle and kind, even carved in stone, this one had none at all. Jairen shuddered. The faceless king gave him a feeling that was so strange, and so frightening, that he could not even put a name to it.

He looked for a nameplate, and saw the gleam of one at the statue's base. But when he bent to look at it more closely, he gasped. It was blank — as blank as the face of the statue.

Jairen straightened up quickly, feeling suddenly as if he must leave the hall at once. And at that moment a door appeared at the end of the hall — a door he hadn't noticed before. It was an immense door, strapped in iron. “I'll never be able to open that,” said Jairen aloud. He walked closer to it, and the door swung open without a noise.

Framed in the doorway was the most beautiful sight Jairen had ever seen. A mountain, far in the distance but so high and so big that it seemed very close. Its slopes were green with living things, and its top was white with frost — at least the part of its top that Jairen could see. Much of the highest part of the mountain

was covered in a bank of thick clouds. Jairen drank in the sight of the magnificent peak.

“Gatekeeper,” he whispered. “I answer your call.” And then, as he gazed at the mountain, its image began to shimmer and fade, until it was only a shadow in his mind.

Jairen stood in the middle of the shop yard, staring down at the staff he held in his hands. He shook his head, trying to clear his mind. The faceless, nameless king. The mountain called Gatekeeper. What did these visions mean? “I must go and find the king,” said Jairen to himself. “He awaits me at Gatekeeper.”

The sound of his own voice brought the boy to his senses. He looked up to find the strange traveler watching him closely, holding his mare steady as he waited for his staff.

“Here it is,” said Jairen, handing it to the man. “I wish you a good journey,” he added, remembering the half-darius that the stranger had given him.

“And I wish you the same,” said the stranger. “We'll meet again.” And then he gave his mare a signal and galloped off into the night before Jairen could think to ask what he meant.

Jairen watched him go. Then, in a daze, he wandered into the house he shared with T'hurl. Without knowing exactly what he was doing — or why — he gathered together a small bundle of clothes and slung it over his shoulder. He took up the short sword that T'hurl had given him on his thirteenth name day, and tucked it into his belt.

Without a backward glance at the room that had been his for so long, he stepped out of the house and walked through the familiar yard. He stood for a moment on the road, looking in each direction. And then he began to walk.

Game Hint

In the vault, use the Talisman (the item you took from the Wyvern) on the slot with the sword over it.

Chapter Two

As he walked the first few miles, Jairen felt excited and light at heart. It was clear to him that he was beginning a great adventure, though he had no real idea of why he was traveling to Gatekeeper Mountain. His plan of finding the faceless king made little sense once he had awoken from his vision, but still he knew he had no choice. He knew that he must keep walking, always toward the east.

By the time that the sky began to darken, though, Jairen's mood was darkening also. He could not stem the flow of questions that ran through his mind. Why was he making this journey? What had the visions he'd seen *meant*? And who was the black-cloaked stranger that had entered his life, only to change it so completely?

Jairen thought, too, of Thurl, and of how the man would feel when he realized that his apprentice had disappeared — perhaps forever. He knew that Thurl was fond of him, and that the smithy would miss his help at the shop. “But it can't be helped,” said Jairen to himself “I must go to Gatekeeper to find the king.”

The words sounded so strange when he said them aloud. Was he going mad, as the village baker had last year? He'd laughed with the others when the baker ran through the streets declaring that he was from another world. But now Jairen wondered if he'd been wrong to laugh. Perhaps what had happened to the baker had happened to him — perhaps he'd lost his mind.

Jairen noticed suddenly that it was nearly dark. He realized that, mad or not, he would need to make camp for the night. Turning off the road he followed, he found a small clearing in the midst of a grove of dindin trees. “Just the place,” he said aloud as he threw down his bundle.

The higher branches of the dindin trees were heavy with fruit. Jairen remembered the jam that Delma used to make from dindin fruits, and his mouth watered. He hadn't thought before about what he would eat on his journey — but at least this night's supper would not be hard to find.

Jairen made himself a crude bed, piling up leaves and grasses

to cushion the hard ground. Then he looked around the grove, trying to decide how best to gather his supper. The dindin trees were tall, with thick, glossy green leaves that nearly hid the yellow fruits. Their trunks rose high before any branches appeared, which made them hard to climb.

At the edge of the grove was a younger, smaller dindin tree, one that to Jairen's expert eye looked as though it could be climbed. He'd never been good at the athletic games that the other boys played, but climbing trees came naturally to him.

Jairen grasped the young tree's slender trunk and pulled himself up it, using his knees to hold on and to propel his body until he could grasp the first branch. And then, just as he was reaching for the plump, yellow fruit (he was so close to it that he could smell its sweet-spicy fragrance, which made him hungrier than ever), he heard a crashing, thumping noise below him.

The sound surprised Jairen so much that he nearly fell from the tree, but he was able to steady himself in time. He looked down from between the heavy leaves that surrounded him, but he saw nothing. The dindin grove was quiet once again.

Jairen reached out again for the fruit and plucked it. Finally! His hunger would soon be gone. He could almost taste the juicy flesh of the fruit he held. And then, he dropped it. He cried out in frustration. That had been the only fruit within reach, and it had been perfectly ripe. Now he would have to climb further. He peered up into the higher branches, trying to plan his route.

“Perfect!” The voice came from directly below him. Jairen looked down, but saw no one. “I owe you all gratitude for throwing me this ripe fruit,” continued the voice.

Jairen leaned far out from the branch he held, straining his eyes as he peered into the darkness. “Who's there?” he asked.

“I might ask the same of you,” answered the voice. “If you'll be polite enough to climb down, perhaps we can introduce ourselves properly.”

Jairen paused for a moment, wondering if the voice could belong to an enemy. But it sounded cheerful enough. It seemed best to follow its suggestion.

He climbed back along the branch he was on, and then slid

down the trunk of the tree, landing with a bump at the bottom. "*Ooof!"* he said, picking himself up. He dusted himself off, and looked around for the owner of the voice he'd heard. At first, he saw no one. The grove looked empty.

"Are you all right?" That voice again! Jairen turned quickly — and still saw no one. "Down here!" said the voice, and Jairen looked down. Then he saw him — a small boy sitting against the trunk of a dindin tree.

The boy stood up and held out his hand, palm up in the sign for greeting. And then Jairen realized that he wasn't a boy. True, he was only about three feet high, but clearly he was an adult. Not a man — not with those pointed ears and that hair that looked more like the hide of a goat — but not a child.

"Fezlyn Quickfoot, at your service," said the creature, grinning at Jairen. "Once you give a fenling dinner, he's your friend for life," he added. His bright green eyes flashed with good humor as he held up the dindin fruit.

A fenling! Jairen could hardly believe it. Delma had told him of fenlings many times, but he'd never thought her stories were true. He'd thought that her tales of the cheerful little people were created for his pleasure — stories to help a young boy drift into a happy slumber. But here was a fenling, a real one, standing right in front of him.

"Do you have a name, human? Or must I give you one?" asked the fenling.

Jairen shook himself. He realized that he was being rude, gaping at the fenling as if it were a creature in one of the traveling fairs that had come, infrequently, to Wooddale. "I am Jairen," he said, holding up his hand in the same gesture that the fenling had used.

Just then, Jairen heard shouts behind him. "This way! This way!" cried several voices at once.

"Jairen," said the fenling, speaking quickly and quietly. "Friend Jairen, grant me this favor. You did not see me. You know no fenling. You have been alone in this grove."

"What?" asked Jairen. "What do you mean?" But the fenling was gone. And suddenly Jairen was surrounded by a crowd of

panting men, many carrying flaming torches, some carrying clubs over their shoulders and one with a length of rope dangling from a meaty hand.

“Where is the little devil?” roared the biggest man, who had a huge red beard.

Jairen took a step back. The man's breath was overpowering — it smelled of onions and of strong wine.

“Where has he hidden?” repeated the man, even more loudly. “I — I don't know,” said Jairen. “I mean — I've seen no one in this grove. Who are you chasing?”

“A thief!” answered the man. “The fiendish thief who has run off with my best hen.”

Jairen had to stifle a laugh. This huge mob was chasing a simple chicken-thief? He tried to look shocked. “A thief!” he answered. “Well, I wish you all luck in finding him,” he said.

The red-bearded one looked at Jairen closely. Jairen met his eyes, doing his best to keep his gaze clear and honest. Then the man nodded and gestured to the rest of the mob. “Onward!” he bellowed, turning to run out of the grove. The other men followed without a glance at Jairen.

Jairen let out a breath. “A vicious group!” he said aloud.

“Vicious indeed,” echoed the fenling, making Jairen jump. How had the little creature reappeared so silently?

“I thank you,” said the fenling. “Now my debt is doubled. You have given me dinner and you have given me my life.”

“They wouldn't have killed you for a chicken, would they?” asked Jairen, amazed. “Besides, you don't even have a hen with you. You couldn't be the thief they were seeking.”

“I gave the hen to the poor family I had stolen it for,” said the fenling. “And yes, they might well have killed me. The men in these parts take thieving seriously. A good enough reason for me to move on. I was named Fezlyn Quickfoot, but those who know me know that I am quick-fingered as well, and I love to thieve.” He smiled at Jairen.

Jairen smiled back. He'd been taught all his life that stealing was wrong, but somehow this fenling was convincing him that

thievery might not always be a crime. That man with the red beard had been fat and well fed, and if his hen had fed a poor family, all the better.

“And where do you journey?” asked the fenling.

Jairen saw that the fenling had noticed his traveling bundle. “I am on my way to Gatekeeper Mountain,” he answered, “on a quest.” For that was what he had decided to call his journey, even though he did not know exactly why he quested.

“You'll need company,” said the fenling firmly. “The way to Gatekeeper is full of dangers. I'll join you, and we'll travel together.”

Jairen paused for only a moment. He knew that his quest would be long and hard. Company especially cheerful company like that which this fenling would provide — would make the journey easier. He'd meant to travel alone, but something told him to welcome this companion.

He nodded to the fenling. “We begin at daybreak, Fezlyn Quickfoot,” he said.

The fenling's smile was broad. “Call me Fez,” he said. “As my friends do.”

Game Hint

There's a secret door in the Drop room. Open the bottom center section of the narrow wall to find it.

Chapter Three

Jairen stretched, and rubbed his eyes. He looked up to see morning sunlight filtering through the leaves of the dindin trees. “A beautiful day,” he said, yawning. “A beautiful day for a journey.” He felt well-rested; the bed he'd made himself had been soft and sweet-smelling.

Jairen thought for a moment of his bed at Thurl's cottage. It had been comfortable enough. If not for the stranger and his staff, Jairen knew he would have woken in that bed every morning for the rest of his life. He, hadn't been looking for adventure — but now that it had found him, he was well pleased.

He was also well pleased with his new traveling companion. The lively fenling was sure to provide plenty of amusement along the way. But where was Mr. Fezlyn Quickfoot now? Jairen sat up and looked around the clearing, but saw no sign of his friend.

“Fez?” he called uncertainly. “Where are you, Fez?” There was no answer. Perhaps the fenling had gone off to gather breakfast. Jairen rose to his feet and stretched, feeling almost awake now.

“So, my lad!” roared a voice behind him. “Lie to me, will you? Do you know how I treat those who protect thieving fenlings?”

Jairen felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up, and his blood ran cold. That voice! It was the huge, red-bearded man from the night before. And he sounded even angrier than he had when Jairen last met him.

Jairen whirled, expecting to see the brute bearing down on him with his enormous club. Instead, he saw Fez, peering out from behind a bush. The fenling was laughing so hard that his face was bright red and tears streamed down his cheek.

“Y-you!” said Jairen. “I thought it was —”

“Frightened you, did I?” asked Fez, still laughing. “A grand joke!”

Jairen tried to shake off the anger that had leapt up inside him. He didn't know if he liked being fooled — or frightened so badly. But he had to admit that Fez was an excellent mimic. “So,

you are a joker as well as a thief," he said. "I'll be on my guard from now on."

"And well you should be, lad," Fez said, using the red-bearded man's voice once more. Then he switched back to his own. "But you have nothing to fear from your friend Fez. Now, what shall we breakfast on?"

"I think I've had my fill of dindin fruit," said Jairen. They'd each had several the night before. "Why don't we set out walking, and perhaps we'll come across something else to eat."

The fenling agreed, and after Jairen had packed up his traveling bundle, they began to walk.

Before long, they emerged from the forest they'd been in, and the land on both sides of the road began to show the signs of man's presence. There were huge, open fields filled with crops of all kinds, and beautiful orchards filled with fruit-bearing trees.

"The Farming Plains," said the fenling. "We should have no trouble finding our breakfast — and our dinner — today."

"We can't steal from these honest farmers!" said Jairen, shocked. But his stomach was growling already, and no other breakfast was in sight.

"Look at the size of these fields," said Fez. "There is enough food here to feed the entire land of Kal Torkus for a year! Come, friend," he said, turning off the road. "Look here at these pentabeans. Do they not look delicious?"

Jairen accepted the pentabean that Fez had plucked from a low bush. It did look good, he had to agree. It was a vivid purple color, streaked with red. The smell that arose from it was enticing — tangy and fresh. Each of its five "fingers" snapped off easily, and Jairen popped them into his mouth without thinking again about the "honest farmers" he was stealing from.

"Mmm,"he said. "Very good." He followed the fenling down a row of pentabeans, picking and eating as he walked, and then into an orchard of tikka trees. Fez turned to him as they stood beneath one of the ancient trees.

"Boost me up, friend Jairen," he said. "And I'll harvest the ripest fruits."

“But I'm full!” said Jairen. “We shouldn't take more than we need.”

“And what of tonight's dinner?” asked the fenling. “There may not be tikka trees nearby when your stomach is empty again later on.”

Jairen had to agree that what Fez said made sense, and so he helped to gather several of the best fruits, storing them in his bundle for later. He glanced over his shoulder several times as they worked, fearful that a farmer would come upon them as they stole his crops.

“Don't worry,” said Fez. “The farmers who work this land live in Brookmead, and we've come far past that village already. Today is a feast day for them, and they won't be coming to the fields.”

Jairen remembered walking through Brookmead the day before. It had been a tiny village, and it was true that the people had looked busy, as if they were preparing for a celebration. “How do you know so much about where we are?” he asked Fez. He'd lived for as long as he could remember in the tiny village of Wooddale, and the world seemed huge and confusing to him. “And how will we know which way to walk as our journey continues?”

The fenling smiled at Jairen's question. “Have you never used a map?” he said, drawing a folded piece of paper from a pocket in his tunic. He opened out the paper and showed it to Jairen. “See, there is Wooddale, and there is Brookmead, and right about… *there*,” he said, pointing, “is where we now stand.”

Jairen marveled at the map. He saw right away how to read it, and his eyes ran immediately to the point where Gatekeeper Mountain was shown. How far it was from where they were! At the rate they were traveling, it would take weeks, perhaps months to reach its slopes. He traced their route with his finger, lost in imagination.

“Look out, lad!” said Fez suddenly, jolting Jairen back to attention. “A band of little ones is approaching. We want nothing to do with them.”

Jairen looked down the road. Who could it be that the tiny fenling would refer to as “little ones”? And how could such small creatures be a threat? He saw a group of perhaps thirty small,

round men coming toward the orchard, laughing and talking as they strolled.

“They are nothing but small men!” said Jairen. “Why should we be afraid of them?” It was true that they carried small axes, and that they were dressed in armor of leather and steel. But they looked peaceable.

“Afraid of a dwarf?” asked Fez. “Me? How dare you suggest such a thing? It's only that I don't like to be around them. They are noisy, and they smell of that terrible stuff that they smoke in their blasted pipes. Fenlings and dwarves have never gotten along.”

“Hoy!” said the leader of the dwarves, as the band drew near. “Is there any tikka fruit left for us?”

“None for those who smell like the goats they resemble!” said Fez, in a taunting voice.

“Fez!” said Jairen, shocked.

“Leave us, little ones,” said Fez, waving the dwarves away. “Go!”

The leader of the dwarves stepped forward, looking angry. “A fenling, calling dwarves 'little'?” he asked, his voice rising. “May you shrink even smaller as you sleep this night, tiny one!” His fists were clenched, and he looked ready to give the fenling a punch.

Jairen stepped forward. “Please,” he said, holding up his hand in greeting. “There is enough fruit for all, if you can put aside your differences. What does it matter that fenlings and dwarves have not gotten along in the past? We can start a new tradition here in this orchard.”

The leader of the dwarves blinked, and then looked at Jairen in astonishment. “How is it that such a young human can speak with such sense?” he said. “You are right, boy. We have just come from the great council in the city of Rivlyn. Much evil is afoot in this land, and there is no need for us to create more.”

Fez looked interested in the news of the council. “I agree,” he said. “And I ask pardon for my spiteful words. Please, come and help yourselves to as much tikka fruit as you can carry!”

Jairen looked at the fenling, and couldn't help grinning. Fez was behaving as if he were the owner of the orchard, instead of a

common thief! He shook his head, smiling at the fenling's ways. But he couldn't complain. At least a terrible fight had been avoided, and he was happy for that.

Chapter Four

Fez waited patiently until the dwarves had eaten their fill of the breadlike tikka fruits. “Have another,” he urged the leader again and again, until the little man finally shook his head.

“No more!” he said. “My belly will burst. Thank you, fenling. You have been a considerate and generous host.”

“You're welcome,” said Fez. “And now, will you tell us more of the great council you come from?” Jairen came closer to hear the dwarf's answer. This council, whatever it was, sounded important.

“My pipe!” called the dwarf leader, and another dwarf brought it. Then the leader sat down under a tikka tree and gestured to the others to join him. Fez sat at his left, Jairen sat at his right, and all the other dwarves arranged themselves in a wide circle.

The dwarf lit his pipe, drew on it, and began to speak. “My name is Avadale,” he said. “And my father and his father before him were also leaders of my tribe. For as long as any one of us can remember, we dwarves have lived in peace with all of the other races that exist on Tyragon.” He blew a smoke ring, and Jairen watched it float up through the branches of the tree they sat beneath.

“But times are changing,” he said. “And evil is creeping through the land, threatening the peaceful life we have loved for so long. At the council, we heard stories of terror, stories of bands of goblins, and orcs, and changelings roaming the land.”

Jairen shuddered. He didn't know much about orcs or goblins — only the stories that Delma had told him — but he knew enough to know that this was not good news.

“What races were at the council?” asked Fez.

“All of them,” answered Avadale. “The Tyens were there, and the druids, and some of the leading, fenlings —”

“I'll bet my Uncle Weslyn Quickfoot was there!” interrupted Fez.

“And even some elves,” finished the dwarf. “Though not many. There have not been many elves in this land since the Great

Upheaval."

"The Great Upheaval?" asked Jairen. "I never learned much Tyragon history. What happened during the Great Upheaval?"

"Oh, so it's history you want, man-child," said Avadale. He settled in more comfortably and puffed on his pipe, looking as though he was ready to tell a long story.

Fez rolled his eyes. "Dwarves *love* to tell the history of Tyragon," he whispered to Jairen. "Now we're in for it."

And Avadale began. "The world was created," he said, "by the all-powerful One. The One created all kinds of life, but the only ones that were more than animals were the Elverdan — the elves. The Elverdan enjoyed a time of great blessing and growth during the Barbaric Age, which is the earliest recorded time in Tyragon's chronicles. During this age, the Elverdan built great cities.

"The end of the Barbaric Age came when the Elverdan began to worship new gods. The One was angered, and brought forth a flaming star called the Portent of Doom, which flew through the skies and created great troubles in the world: floods and shaking of the earth. The land was ripped and torn, and the Elverdan fled into hiding. By the time the star had disappeared, the Elverdan were forever changed.

"Some, who had fled to the caves, had become short and stooped. They had learned to work with the ores and minerals beneath the surface of the planet. They became known as dwarves. Others, who fled across the southern deserts and learned to tame the wild beasts and to band together for strength, became known as humans."

Jairen sat up straighter. He'd never realized that he was descended from elves. "And the others?" he asked.

"The ones that went north into the cold wastes became strong from fighting the elements. They are the only ones who can fight the goblins of that region. They are called barbarians. And the ones that fled into the swamps, who grew short and very quick — they are called fenlings."

Fez nodded wisely, but didn't interrupt.

"There are other races in the land, and all come from elves. And there are very few true elves left," continued the dwarf. "Now,

all these races began to grow and prosper and explore the world, during the Age of Enlightenment. During that age, the Circle of Twelve was formed—a council of knowledge that met within Gatekeeper Mountain, at the Castle Shadowgate."

Jairen gasped at the mention of Gatekeeper. He hadn't known that there was a castle within it! Perhaps that was where he would find the faceless king.

"The next age was the Great Expansion, during which there were many battles and great wars over boundaries. This was when Kal Torlin was founded," said the dwarf. "And after that came an even worse time, the War of the Races. During that time, one member of the Circle of Twelve turned evil and began to practice the black arts. He was banished from the circle, and became known as the Tykl Droelyn, which means "he who commands the darkness." Humans have given him a simpler name: The Warlock King. He turned the races against each other and caused chaos in the land.

"During the Dark Age that followed, there was a kind of peace. The societies of the world began to rebuild. But then, the Time of Chaos came, with the Rage Wars, where the Warlock King emerged to make war on all the good folk of the land. He and his forces — trolls, goblins, ogres, and the like — fought hard against the kings of the land and their followers — the humans, dwarves, elves, and other little folk. Finally, though, the Circle of Twelve gathered strength and helped the kings defeat the Warlock King."

"What happened to him?" asked Jairen. "Was he put to death?"

"I wish he had been," said the dwarf. "But the Circle of Twelve decided that life imprisonment in the caverns below Castle Shadowgate would be enough punishment. After that decision, the circle disbanded, and most of them vanished from history. Only Lakmir the Timeless stayed behind as guardian of the land.

"The Rebuilding Years came next — a peaceful time. And after that, the Time of Sorrow, when almost all of the Elverdan disappeared mysteriously from the land. Also at that time, the last of the DelDanian seers died. The seers were a powerful race that could see into the future and predict what would happen."

"Too bad they're gone," said Jairen. "I would have loved to

meet one of them!"

"Yes," said the dwarf. "And their gift would be useful to us now. The final age in Tyragon history was the Light Age, a time of peace. This was a good time for all races, until a group of foolish dwarves on an adventure stumbled upon the Warlock King in his cavernous prison. Believe it or not, they let him go! And now he is once again bringing evil to the land."

"But what about Lakmir the Timeless?" asked Jairen, who had been following the story closely. "Isn't he the guardian of Tyragon now? He'll protect us from the Warlock King, won't he?"

"He will try," said Avadale. "But he cannot do it alone. I heard at the council that he is searching now for the one who will fulfill the last prophecy of the seers. He searches for the one who will defeat the Warlock King."

"And who is that?" asked Jairen.

"I have heard tell that there is a faceless statue in the Great Hall at the Castle Shadowgate," said the dwarf.

Jairen leaned closer, holding his breath.

"That king is the one who will fulfill the prophecy," finished Avadale. "And Lakmir seeks him."

"So do I," whispered Jairen . "So do I."

By the time the dwarf had finished his story, night had fallen. The other dwarves had built a high bonfire, and many of them had gone to sleep beside it. But Jairen was too excited to sleep. His quest was connected to great events in the history of his world! He forced himself to stay awake, and he questioned Avadale until he felt sure that he had learned as much as he could from the dwarf.

"One final warning," said the dwarf, yawning. "Lakmir is not the only one who seeks the lost king. The Death Wraiths, servants of the Warlock King, seek him too. If they find him, they will kill him. They will also kill any innocent beings who happen to be in their way, so take heed!"

Jairen shivered, even though he was warmed by the huge fire nearby. Death Wraiths. Goblins. Orcs. He glanced at Fez, who was sleeping soundly. The fenling wore a contented smile as he slept near the fire, his belly full of tikka fruit and his head full of dwarf

stories.

Did Fez know how to fight off orcs? What would they do if the Death Wraiths swooped down on them? Suddenly, Jairen wondered if this adventure might be more dangerous than he'd imagined.

“But we've already come too far to turn back now,” he said aloud. Nobody answered. He was the only one left awake. The fire crackled and popped as it died down to coals, and Jairen sat alone and watched it until the sun finally began to rise.

Chapter Five

Jairen woke with a start, feeling hot and sweaty and very confused. Where was he? He tried to shake the foggy feeling from his head. The sun was beating down from a cloudless sky. He squinted and looked around.

The dead campfire was the clue that made him remember everything. As soon as he saw the smoldering coals, he knew where he was. In the tikka grove. But where were the dwarves? And Fez? And how long had he been sleeping? The last thing he remembered was watching the sun begin to rise.

“Did your smithy friend let you laze abed this long every day?” asked a voice from above. Jairen looked up to see Fez sitting on a low branch of a tikka tree, grinning and swinging his heels.

“I-I'm sorry!” said Jairen. “I was up most of the night, and then —”

“*Shhh!”* said the fenling. “It is of no matter. The dwarves have left — they bid you farewell and promised that we will see them again. Now, have some breakfast, and we'll be on our way.” He tossed a tikka fruit down to Jairen. Then he swung down out of the tree.

Jairen sat and ate, feeling more awake with each mouthful. After a while, he noticed that Fez was watching him closely. The fenling looked very curious. “What is it?” asked Jairen. “Do I have juice on my chin?” He wiped at his face.

“No, friend Jairen,” answered Fez. “I am looking at you, trying to puzzle out why that old dwarf's dull story meant so much to you.” He leaned closer to Jairen. “I saw your eyes widen when he spoke of the faceless king. Why?”

“The story was anything but dull to my ears,” answered Jairen. “Come, let's start on our way. I'll tell you the tale of why I journey to Gatekeeper Mountain.” They gathered their belongings, made sure the fire was completely out, and began to walk.

The sun was bright and the day was warm. As they walked, Jairen told Fez the story of his quest: How he'd touched the

stranger's staff and had an incredible vision; how he'd felt that he must go to Gatekeeper to find the faceless king; how he'd started off right away.

"And then the dwarf spoke of the very same faceless king last night!" said Fez. "It is no wonder you were fascinated by his tale."

"And frightened by it, too," admitted Jairen. "I did not like hearing the news of orcs and such."

"Oh, orcs," said Fez, waving his hand in dismissal. "They may be strong, but they're so stupid that it's no trouble at all to trick them. Remember, you're traveling with a fenling now! There's no need to be fearful."

Jairen gave Fez a look. Was the fenling really as brave as he sounded? With luck, his boasting would never be tested.

The road they followed curved gently through fields and orchards, just as it had the day before. But now and then, it was edged on one side by the Western Forest, which reached out its arms toward the Farming Plains.

Jairen noticed that the forest here looked very different than the forest that bordered Wooddale. The forest near his home had been a friendly place, a quiet haven for a lonely boy. He'd spent hours there, splashing in brooks, searching for interesting plants, training the tiny wood-snits to eat out of his hand.

But there were no wood-snits in this forest. Nor were there any birds, or bright flowers, or sparkling brooks. This forest was dark, and gloomy, and very, very quiet. It had a strange smell to it — musty and dank. Jairen was glad that, so far, the road had only run next to the forest and had not taken them straight into it.

"Tell me more about your Aunt Delma," said Fez. Jairen had told his new friend a little about his life, and Fez seemed interested in all the details.

"What I remember most was her stories," said Jairen thoughtfully. "She knew so many. When the other children teased me and I came home crying, she would distract me by telling me of elves and fenlings and all kinds of magical things."

"Why did the other children tease you?" asked Fez, bewildered.

“Why?” echoed Jairen, sure that Fez himself was teasing. “Isn't it obvious?” He pointed to the birthmark on his cheek. “You must have noticed this awful thing.”

Fez looked closely at the mark. “Awful? Why?” he asked. “It looks just like Traal, my favorite moon. It's lovely. You're lucky to have it.” He looked seriously at Jairen. “Don't you know that marks like that are often there for a reason? It means that you are special in some way.”

Jairen couldn't believe his ears. “That's what Aunt Delma used to say,” he said. He smiled happily at Fez. He still hated the moon-shaped birthmark on his face, but it was good to know that his new friend wouldn't tease him about it.

And then his smile disappeared. “What was *that*?” he asked, looking past Fez and into the dark forest. His face had turned white with fear.

“What?” asked Fez. “I saw nothing.”

“There!” said Jairen, pointing into the woods. There was a flash of movement, but nothing more.

“Stay calm, friend,” said Fez. “What you saw was likely just a bird or some such forest creature.” The fenling looked carefully around. “Let's move on,” he said.

They began to walk again, but Jairen was uneasy. He knew very well that there were no birds in this forest. He looked over his shoulder after every few steps, checking to see whether they were being followed. Fez kept up a stream of chatter, trying to distract him.

“Remember, friend, they don't call me Quickfoot for nothing,” he said. “I can outrun any person or creature on Tyragon!” He went on, boasting of wild races and incredible victories, but Jairen was hardly listening. “… and then,” he continued, “there was the time that I —”

He broke off and stared to his right, into the dark forest. “What?” asked Jairen. “What did you see?”

“Nothing,” said Fez, shaking his head as if to clear his vision. “Nothing at all.” But Jairen noticed that the fenling began to walk a little faster, and that he, too, began to check over his shoulder now and then.

Before long, they came to a place where the road headed straight into the forest. They would have to leave the sunlight behind, and walk into the gloom. Jairen came to a stop. “Isn't there another way?” he asked.

Fez pulled out his map and checked it. “No,” he said. “But soon enough the road will come back out onto the plains. We'll have no trouble getting through this small grove.”

The “small grove” looked huge and frightening to Jairen, but he took a deep breath and began to walk. There was no other choice. Within moments there was no sun to be seen at all — the thick leaves and vines choked it out completely. Fez and Jairen walked quietly, listening for suspicious noises.

“This isn't so bad,” said Jairen after a few minutes. “And we'll be back out on the plains very soon.”

“Not soon enough for my taste,” muttered the fenling. “Not soon enough.”

And then the quiet was shattered by an unearthly howl. Jairen stopped in his tracks, and Fez bumped into him. “Goblins,” said Fez quietly. “I was afraid of this.”

“Goblins?” asked Jairen. “What do we do now?”

“RUN!” said Fez, just as they were surrounded on three sides by the kind of monstrous dark shapes that Jairen had seen over and over again in his childhood nightmares.

Jairen ran. He ran as fast as he ever had, following Fez's path through the woods. He felt the hot breath of the goblins on his back, and he ran faster. He burst into the small clearing in the woods, right on the fenling's heels.

And there he was. The gray-bearded stranger. The one with the staff. He sat by a small fire, warming his hands, and he looked up calmly as Fez and Jairen stumbled into his sight. “Welcome,” he said, smiling.

Game Hint

Use the wand to get past the snake on the other side of the rotting bridge in the Chasm room.

Chapter Six

Jairen couldn't believe his eyes. How could the old man sit there so serenely? After all, his quiet grove had just been disturbed by first a frantic fenling and then a shrieking boy, with a horde of howling goblins close on their heels. But the stranger's calm was contagious, and the moment he saw him, Jairen felt a wave of peacefulness wash over him. Somehow he knew that the stranger would take care of him, keep him safe.

As the first of the goblins entered the grove, the stranger stood up and shrugged off his heavy cape. He held up his hands, pointing all ten fingers at the creature. There was a mighty flash, and Jairen covered his eyes for fear of going blind. Lightning! But where had it come from? The sky, before they'd entered the forest anyway, had been clear.

Three more goblins ran howling into the clearing. Jairen felt the urge to hide behind a tree, but he couldn't seem to make his feet move. Fear had frozen him to the spot where he stood, Fez beside him. Fez was not boasting now! The fenling was silent now as the goblins advanced, baring their teeth and claws. They were close enough now for Jairen to see them clearly, and the sight was not pleasant.

They were dressed in rotten, ill-fitting leather, and they howled and grunted as they waved their short swords wildly. Their bodies seemed to be carved from solid rock; the muscles in their arms and legs were like iron. Their faces were cruel, and filled with anger and hatred. Jairen had never seen anything so ugly. Or so frightening.

The three creatures had gotten close enough by now so that Jairen thought he could smell their foul breath. It had an odor like the gases that rose from the swamp behind the smithy's house. He put his hand over his mouth and nose, trying to block the smell.

The stranger stood calmly, holding up one hand and speaking odd-sounding words under his breath. "*A-nai tsa worth*," he said. "*A-nai tsi krith*." And the three goblins began to trip and fall.

At first, Jairen couldn't see what they were falling over, but

the roots grew so fast, putting out branches and vines, that soon it was clear. The goblins were being trapped in a tangle of wild and sudden growth.

"*Aaargh!*" they shouted in frustration, striking out with their short swords. But the vines were snarled securely around them. The goblins had been stopped.

But still more poured into the clearing. Fez and Jairen stood clutching each other, unsure of whether to run or stand. The stranger did not flinch. He continued to speak under his breath as he first waved his hands in intricate patterns, then held them up with fingers pointing at the goblins.

Fireballs flew through the air, singeing the leather armor of the attacking hordes and destroying the goblins that were hit directly. Lightning flashed again and again. And then, bigger, fiercer creatures began to emerge behind the goblins.

"Hobgoblins," whispered Fez. "They're the ones that force the goblins to fight. They're not only bigger, they're smarter, too. Much more dangerous."

Jairen looked back at Fez, his eyes wide with fear. But Fez seemed calmer now. The fenling watched with interest as the stranger in the middle of the clearing performed an odd series of hand gestures. "He knows how to fight these creatures," he said admiringly. "The main thing is to take care of the hobgoblins. It's very simple, really. You see, the goblins don't really like to fight all that much, but the hobgoblins make them do it. So all you have to do is —"

His calm analysis of the stranger's technique was interrupted by the sudden appearance of what seemed like hundreds of goblins, entering the clearing from all sides at once with teeth bared and swords drawn. Their howls were deafening.

Jairen closed his eyes, swaying as if he were about to faint. There was no way to escape! He and Fez — and the stranger, too — were clearly about to be torn to shreds. Then he felt a firm hand on his wrist. He opened his eyes and turned to see the stranger standing between him and Fez. The tall man held each of them in his surprisingly strong grasp.

And then, Jairen had to close his eyes again, because

something very odd had begun to happen. All three of them had begun to move straight upward, rising so quickly that Jairen's stomach seemed to fall as his head grew light. Then the rising stopped and Jairen opened his eyes.

He found himself sitting, along with Fez and the stranger, on a sturdy branch high above the clearing. “Isn't this better?” asked the stranger, smiling at Jairen. “They don't even notice we're gone,” he added, pointing down at the goblins.

It was true. The goblins had gotten themselves into such a battle frenzy that they couldn't stop fighting. The noise was terrible, even from so high, as hundreds of goblins tore each other apart, howling and gnashing their teeth.

“Ha!” laughed Fez. “Look at them go!” He gave a loud whoop. “Go on, boys!” he yelled. “Don't stop now!”

“Fez!” said Jairen. “Quiet! What if they hear you?” He was afraid that the goblins would swarm right up the tree if they noticed the two humans and the fenling above them.

“Do not worry, lad,” said the stranger gently. “Goblins cannot climb trees. We are safe here.” It was as if he'd read Jairen's mind. “In any case,” he added. “It looks like they are finished fighting.”

Jairen looked down. It was true that there was no longer any noise or activity in the clearing below. It had taken no more than a few seconds for the fight to end. Dead goblins lay every which way on the ground, piled high in some places. Their thick black blood pooled beneath them, and their swords and shields were scattered all over the clearing.

Jairen heard the stranger mutter a few words — not in any language he understood—and then he felt his stomach lurch again as all three of them dropped gently to the ground. By instinct, they all moved out of the clearing and walked quickly and quietly through the forest, emerging before long on the sunny, bright road that curved over the plains.

Fez stopped in his tracks as soon as they left the forest, turned to the stranger, and put his hands on his hips. “Who are you?” he demanded.

“Fez!” said Jairen. Why did the fenling always behave so rudely? But Jairen was curious, as well. This man possessed the

staff that had sent him on his quest. And he obviously possessed some other magical powers, as well. “What Fez means, I think,” he said, glaring at his friend, “is that we'd like to know your name so that we can thank you for saving our lives.”

The stranger laughed. “No thanks are needed,” he said. “But I will gladly tell you my name. I am known as Lakmir.”

Fez drew a sudden breath and took two steps back. “Lakmir the Timeless?” he asked. “But you are the most powerful wizard in Tyragon!” The fenling looked frightened. “My deepest apologies for any disrespect I may have shown you!”

Lakmir laughed again. “Don't worry, little fenling. I won't turn you into a frog. Not today.”

Jairen had not yet found his voice. Lakmir the Timeless himself had saved his life! S-Sir,” he finally said, stuttering a little. “How did you do it? I mean — how —?” He gestured with his hands, trying to recall how they'd risen to the high branch. “And why? *You* were the one throwing the fireballs, weren't you? Wouldn't it have been braver to stay and fight than to run away like that?”

Lakmir smiled. “So many questions, little one. First of all, using your head is always better than fighting. We could never have killed every goblin in that clearing, even with all the magic in the world. So we just let them destroy each other, instead. And as for how, to teach you how would take a lifetime, lad,” he answered. “But there are some smaller spells I can show you. Come, sit with me here.” He led them off the road and into the shade of an old banty tree.

The afternoon passed quickly into evening as Lakmir taught Jairen how to make the simple spells that can control fire. Fez napped, bored by the complicated incantations. And finally, when night came, Jairen slept as well.

His sleep was heavy, except for one moment in the night when he felt a cold presence. He woke to see a shadowy figure, high in the night sky. Lakmir, sitting awake beside him, spoke quietly in his ear.

“A Death Wraith,” said the wizard. “It is searching for something, but it will find nothing tonight. Sleep now, lad,” he

said, passing his hand over Jairen's face. And, feeling safe again, Jairen slept.

Chapter Seven

When Jairen awoke, Fez was stirring the fire and Lakmir was nowhere in sight. Jairen felt peaceful and well rested, and the sight of the Death Wraith in the dark night sky was no more than a foggy memory. He stretched and yawned.

“Hungry?” asked Fez. “Try one of these.” He pulled a rootlike object out of the coals where it had been warming, and tossed it to Jairen.

Jairen caught it, looked it over, and took a cautious bite. “It's good,” he said after a moment. “What is it?”

“Ground apples, they're called,” said Fez. “I know where to dig for them. They aren't the most exciting food, but they'll keep you alive if you have nothing else.”

Jairen nodded and kept on eating. He glanced toward the dark, gloomy forest that they had run from the day before. It already seemed long ago that the goblins had been chasing them. He said so to Fez, and the fenling nodded.

“We were lucky to stumble across Lakmir,” he said. And then, as if to himself, he added quietly, “or was it luck at all? But why would the most powerful wizard in Tyragon waste his time saving the lives of a fenling and a boy?”

Jairen barely heard him. He was remembering the way that Lakmir had rescued them. How calm the wizard had been in the face of the goblin attack! Jairen was in awe of Lakmir's power. If only the wizard could be with them for the whole length of their journey — then Jairen would feel safe. But he knew it couldn't be. Lakmir had more important things to do, no doubt.

He finished his ground apple and turned to Fez. “Shall we go?” he asked. Fez nodded and got to his feet.

“It will be an easy day's walk across the plains,” he said. He showed Jairen the map. “And by this afternoon we'll be entering the Olden Stand.”

“The Olden Stand!” said Jairen. “Aunt Delma used to tell me tales of that forest. Isn't it enchanted?”

“Never mind those old stories,” answered Fez, smiling. “Nothing to them.” He puffed up his chest. “In any case, what do we have to worry about? We outsmarted those goblins, didn't we?”

Jairen laughed, shaking his head. The fenling seemed to have forgotten already how close they'd been to being torn apart by the goblin mob — until Lakmir's magic had saved them. “That's right, Fez,” he said, in good humor. “We most certainly did outsmart those goblins.”

They followed the road as it rose and fell over the broad plains, enjoying the sun on their backs and the breezes that kept them cool. They talked less than they had the day before; each of them was busy with his own thoughts.

They saw the Olden Stand long before they reached it. Its ancient trees were taller than any Jairen had seen before. The forest loomed before them as the road led up to it, but this forest did not frighten Jairen the way the other one had. It was dark, true, but there was something inviting about the darkness. It looked cool and pleasant after the dusty heat of the open road.

They paused only for a moment at the spot where the road entered the forest. Jairen looked back at the wide open plains. The land there had been tamed by men using plows to plant their crops. It looked familiar, safe. But when he turned and looked again into the forest he felt a surge of excitement.

“Let's go!” he said. Fez nodded. They walked into the Olden Stand, and right away, Jairen knew that this was a most magical place. The breezes moved through the highest branches of the trees, creating a silvery, musical sound. Brilliantly colored birds — ones he'd never seen or even imagined before — flew, singing gaily, from branch to branch. Flowering vines hung, from every limb, filling the air with a sweet, heavy scent.

Jairen sighed. “This is a beautiful place,” he said. “Let's not hurry through it, Fez.” There was no answer. “Fez?” said Jairen. “Where are you, Fez?”

He whirled around frantically, looking for his friend. And then he saw the elves. There must have been half-a-hundred of them, and they'd all moved so silently that he'd never heard a single footstep! They were almost as tall as men, but much thinner, so that they could hide easily behind the youngest sapling. They wore

brown breeches and tunics of forest green, and they carried bows slung over their shoulders.

Two of them were holding Fez by the arms, gently but firmly. And now two others took hold of Jairen. Jairen and Fez exchanged looks. Fez looked more angry than frightened; Jairen knew he must be furious that he, a Quickfoot, had been captured so easily.

Jairen felt little fear. The elves did not seem warlike or bloodthirsty. “Why do you hold us?” he asked the one holding his right arm. Did they even understand his language?

“Our king requests your presence,” answered the elf in a strange, lilting accent. “We are taking you to see him now.” As he spoke, he began to wrap Jairen round and round with vines, binding his arms close to his body.

“There's no need to tie us!” yelled Fez, who was also being wrapped with vines. “We'll come peacefully.” But the elves ignored his cries and finished their job. Then they hoisted their prisoners over their shoulders, three elves to each captive, and began to run silently through the woods, following a path that only they could see.

Jairen tried to relax; he saw right away that struggling would only make things worse for him. He looked over at Fez and saw that the fenling's face was bright red with anger. At least Fez was holding his tongue for once — maybe he knew that there was no point in insulting their captors.

The elves sang a song as they ran lightly through the forest, and Jairen enjoyed the sound of it, despite his uncomfortable position.

Vine and branch and flower of dawn,
Dew has fallen and night is gone.
This day brings us joys and pleasure,
Every moment shall we treasure…

They sang, in voices as silvery as the breeze in the treetops. And then, all at once, they stopped and set Jairen on his feet. They unwrapped the vines that bound him, and pushed him and Fez

toward what looked like an old tree stump.

As they approached, the stump seemed to tilt back, opening so that they could see the beautifully carved throne within. And on the throne sat an ancient elf, dressed in silken green robes.

“Welcome,” he said. “I am sorry that my men had to treat you as prisoners, but it was for your own safety. We elves know this forest well, having lived here for centuries. It is our home, and it is safe for us. But there are many dangers for those who wander innocently through it.”

Jairen bowed, pulling Fez along with him. He felt somehow that this king deserved his respect. “We thank you, King. We apologize for trespassing and we ask for safe passage through your forest, as we are on a quest to the far reaches of the land.”

The king nodded graciously and gestured to them to rise. “Tell me more of your quest, man-child,” he said to Jairen.

Jairen told him the story of the faceless king and of his need to find him. “He awaits me at Gatekeeper Mountain,” he finished. “I am sure of it.”

The king looked closely at Jairen, and Jairen automatically put his hand over the mark on his face, trying to hide the ugly thing. “Don't cover it,” said the king. “It is the mark of true blood. Your quest is a noble one, and I give you a noble name to carry with you. I call you Lyth'n K'tarr. Seed of Prophecy. And may you journey well.”

He gestured to the elfin guard standing nearby. “See that they reach the other side of our forest in safety,” he commanded. The elves obeyed at once, escorting Jairen and Fez out of the clearing.

Jairen looked back, wanting to ask the elf-king more, but the stump had closed again and the king was not in sight. “Seed of Prophecy?” What did the name mean? And why had they been taken before the king to begin with? Were all travelers through this forest brought to meet him? But his questions were not to be answered. He and Fez were taken quickly to the edge of the forest, and sent on their way.

Game Hint

To get past the Cyclops, use the sling and a rock to knock him out. Then use your sword to finish him off.

Chapter Eight

“You were very quiet while we were with the elves,” said Jairen to Fez as they walked along the road. It was hot again, and dusty, and Jairen missed the cool sweetness of the air in that enchanted forest.

“Elves are very ancient beings,” said Fez. “And they know much magic. A mere fenling knows to keep quiet when he is around them, lest they turn him into a tree sprite!” He smiled at Jairen. “It was you that the elf-king had interest in, you know. You and that Traal-mark on your face. Are you sure that you are who you think you are, a simple village boy?”

“Fez!” said Jairen, laughing. “Of course! Who else would I be — the king of Kal Tarkus?” He whooped. “Come, friend,” he said. “Let's forget about magic and marks and strange creatures for a while, and just enjoy our journey.”

Fez nodded, and said no more. They walked on in silence, as the afternoon sun beat down. There was still forest on one side of the road, which lent some needed shade, but the other side was open land.

“Why does no one farm here?” asked Jairen, after a while. “It looks like good enough land.”

“Too near the swamp of Darkmire,” answered Fez. “People are afraid, and rightly so, of some of the creatures that call that swamp their home.”

Jairen did not even want to ask Fez about the creatures he spoke of. Better not to know! “It's too bad there are no crops here,” he said instead. “I'm beginning to feel hungry.”

“And so am I,” answered Fez. “But a fenling can always find food. We'll be dining well before long, my friend. Just be patient.”

They continued to walk, stomachs grumbling, as the sun fell and the shadows began to lengthen. Jairen tried not to think of home and of the regular meals he'd had there — hearty stews that Thurl left cooking all day on a low fire.

And then Fez stopped suddenly, and sniffed the air. “Hmmm,”

he said. “I smell a delicious smell. I smell dinner!” He peered into the growing darkness. “There!” he added, pointing. “A fire. Some travelers have stopped to sup along the way. I'm sure they'll have enough to share. And I'll make it easy for them to do it, too. They'll never see the fenling in their midst!”

He darted off before Jairen could stop him. “Fez!” Jairen whispered hoarsely as he stumbled after his friend. “Wait! You can't just steal from them.” But it was no use. The fenling moved quickly toward the distant fire, with Jairen following him.

Fez slowed as he neared the fire. He sniffed again. “They're roasting a shippu!” he said. “My favorite meat. Stay back, now,” he said to Jairen. “I'm going to slip closer.”

Jairen hung back, waiting in the shadows. He couldn't see what kind of creatures sat around the fire, though their shadows looked frighteningly large. The smell of roasting meat made his mouth water. “Oh, be careful, Fez!” he said, under his breath.

He watched as Fez crept quietly, moving closer and closer to the fire. And then, as he looked on in horror, one of the creatures got up, stretched, and yawned. Jairen saw it clearly now in the flickering light from the fire, and knew right away what it must be. A troll! Nothing else could be that big. “Oh, Fez!” he said, almost to himself. “Watch out!” But it was too late.

The troll turned away from the fire just at the wrong moment. It turned just in time to see Fez darting past it, moving quickly toward the roasting meat.

“*Aaaargh!*” shouted the troll, and all of the other trolls (there were at least six of them, by Jairen's quick count) leapt to their feet. The first one reached out and grabbed the fenling, picking him up by his ears as if he were a wood-snit. Three others turned and ran in every direction, looking for more intruders.

Jairen's heart skipped a beat, and then started to pound so hard that he thought it would burst. He looked to his right and to his left, into the dark shadows, trying to decide where to run. But that one moment of hesitation was a terrible mistake. Before he could run anywhere, he felt the rough hand of a troll as it grabbed him and swept him into the air.

“Fez!” he yelled.

“I'm here!” shouted Fez. “Don't panic. Keep your head about you. We'll be fine!”

“Ho, ho!,” laughed the troll holding Jairen. “You'll be fine, that's true,” he grunted in a deep, thick voice. “You'll be a fine, fine dinner for some hungry trolls.” He walked back toward the fire, swinging Jairen by his heels.

As they entered the ring of light that the fire threw off, Jairen saw the other trolls, all on guard now with weapons drawn. Several held huge, heavy two-handed swords. One had an axe bigger than any Jairen had ever seen in the smithy. There were other weapons scattered around the site — heavy-looking war hammers, maces, and clubs, for the most part.

“Shall we roast them now?” grunted one of the trolls. “Or tie them and save them for breakfast?”

“Now!” answered another. “One shippu is hardly enough for all of us to dine on.”

The troll holding Jairen walked even closer to the fire, and got ready to throw him onto it. “Right!” he said, “but add one man-child and one fenling, and we'll have a royal feast!” The flames leapt high, and Jairen felt their heat sear his face.

Chapter Nine

Jairen struggled, but the troll that held him only gripped him harder in its calloused hands. He felt its fingernails digging into the soft flesh of his leg. The troll held him over the fire, dangling him so close to the hot flames that the hair on his arms was singed.

Jairen couldn't breathe. This was certainly the end of him! How silly he'd been to think that he could undertake this quest. He was nothing but a boy — and a weak, useless boy at that. “Fez!” he called, in a ragged voice. There was no answer. The fenling must already be roasting on the fire — and it was all Jairen's fault. Bad enough that he'd gotten himself into this mess, but to drag his new friend into it as well was inexcusable.

Only Lakmir could save them now, but Lakmir was nowhere in sight. And why should he save them, in any case? He'd saved them once, and here they were already in trouble again. Jairen closed his eyes. He couldn't look at the hot fire any longer. And then, he saw the image of Lakmir. Calm, peaceful Lakmir, standing under an old banty tree in his long black cape. He was showing Jairen a spell.

Of course! The spells for fire. Jairen's eyes popped open. How could he have forgotten? Without even stopping to think, he muttered a few strange words under his breath. The flames immediately leapt higher — so high that the troll that held Jairen stepped back in awe. “Wrong spell,” said Jairen to himself. He tried again, with a different combination of words.

And then it was dark. The fire had snuffed itself out almost before Jairen had finished the spell, and there was now only a little moonlight to brighten the clearing.

“*Grrraaagh!*” yelled the troll who held Jairen, frustrated by the sudden loss of his cooking fire. “Now what do we do?” he asked the other trolls. “I'm hungry!”

“Eat them raw!” shouted a troll standing nearby. “Eat them right now!”

Them? thought Jairen. Good! The fenling has not yet been roasted. But they were not safe yet. The troll still held Jairen in an

iron grip, and though he squirmed and kicked, he could not get away. And then he felt the troll pulling his boots off, as if it were peeling a fruit before eating it.

"Help!" he shouted, not knowing who or what might possibly help him.

"Yes, help!" squeaked Fez from nearby.

As if in answer to their cries, a shadowy figure jumped into the clearing, arms moving in a blur. Blue steel flashed in the weak moonlight as the figure wielded a pair of sharp, curved scimitars, swinging them so quickly that Jairen could hardly follow their arc.

Trolls scattered as the figure ran at them. The swordsman dodged their hastily swung war clubs and kept thrusting mercilessly with his own shining weapons. The troll holding Jairen dropped him and ran, leaving Jairen gasping on the ground. Catching his breath, he crawled out of the way of the battle, calling for Fez as he looked for a safe place to hide.

"Here I am, friend Jairen," whispered Fez into the darkness. "Who is this troll-killer?"

They sat and watched, amazed, as the figure leapt and dodged, flipping his swords from hand to hand as the trolls jumped out at him one by one. The swordsman was much smaller than the smallest troll, but their brute strength seemed to give them no advantage over him. He was so quick, and his swordplay so lethal, that before long every troll lay silent in a wide circle around the dead campfire.

As soon as he was sure that every troll was dead, Jairen said the spell to bring the fire back to life. Its flickering light showed him all too well that the swordsman had done his job. Fez looked at the huge, bleeding bodies with round eyes.

"One man against seven trolls," he said. "Not many men would still be standing."

The swordsman stepped into the circle of firelight, wiping his weapons and checking to see that they were clean before he sheathed them. That done, he looked up at Jairen and Fez, who still stood dumbfounded. He was a tall, imposing man who wore a black hooded cloak, a leather tunic, and high boots. He carried a bow over one shoulder, and a dagger was stuck in his belt. He

looked at the boy and the fenling with eyes that were an uncannily calm deep gray. “I am Hawk,” he said, as if that explained everything.

“A-And I am Jairen,” said Jairen, his voice squeaking. “And this is Fez.”

Fez bowed his head to the stranger. “We owe you our lives,” he said. “Never have I seen such swordplay! And your courage in fighting seven trolls at once —”

“It was nothing,” interrupted Hawk. He spoke in a brusque voice and did not seem willing to say more than he had to.

Jairen was surprised at the way his friend was acting. For once there was no boasting, no name calling. But Jairen was as awed as Fez was. “Fez is right,” he said to the man. “We owe you many thanks. We were lucky that you stumbled across our path. You must be the strongest man in Tyragon!”

“Strength!” said the Hawk. “Bah. Strength is nothing. It's balance that makes a good fighter. Balance and practice.”

“Well, I'm glad to hear that strength isn't important,” said Jairen. “But even with practice, I doubt I could ever fight like that!”

“You can do anything you set your mind to,” said Hawk. “Decide to do it, keep trying, and never give up. That's all it takes.”

“Do you mean to say that even a fenling could fight such battles?” asked Fez.

“A fenling could, if a fenling so desired,” said Hawk. Then he smiled, and for the first time his face looked less grim. “But most fenlings I know would rather thieve and play tricks than fight.”

Fez laughed. “You know my race well. Do you come from Kal Tarkus?”

“No,” said Hawk, his face closing up again. He looked as if he might never speak again.

Jairen flashed Fez a look. Perhaps it was best to avoid questioning this stranger too closely. “We are traveling together on a quest,” he told the man, “and we would be honored if you would journey with us and teach us some of what you know of fighting.” Then he stopped and bit his tongue. Was he being too forthright?

Why would such a warrior want to travel with a weakling boy and a fenling?

“Our paths have crossed for a reason, I think,” answered Hawk. “I will travel with you for a short while.”

Jairen let out a relieved breath. He had not offended the stranger! And now their journey would be safe. No creature could harm him — or his fenling friend — as long as Hawk walked with them.

Chapter Ten

As he lay down by the fire, ready to sleep that night, Jairen looked through his eyelashes at the figure of Hawk. The man sat with back straight and eyes alert, peering past the fire as though he were keeping watch. Jairen smiled to himself and, feeling safe, fell asleep at once.

In the morning, Hawk still sat by the fire. He looked rested, but Jairen wondered if he had slept at all. Fez was wondering the same thing.

“Is he human?” he asked Jairen in a whisper. “Every time I woke in the night, there he sat, staring into the dark!” He shook his head. “I don't believe he needs to sleep, or eat, or do any of the things that we do to keep ourselves alive.”

“Of course he's human,” answered Jairen, who wasn't quite as sure as he sounded. “Didn't you see that scar on his face? If he is cut he bleeds, just like the rest of us. And as for whether he eats, offer him one of those tikka fruits you've been carrying, and you'll see.”

Fez nodded, and turned to his bundle to search out the fruit he'd saved, in case of lean times. He walked over to Hawk and offered it, almost shyly, to him. “Breakfast, sir?” he asked. Jairen could tell that he was trying hard not to stare at the deep scar on Hawk's left cheek.

“I thank you, friend,” answered Hawk. “It has been too long since my last meal.” He bit hungrily into the fruit.

Fez stepped back and gave Jairen a glance and a nod. He seemed convinced that their new friend was human after all. Jairen waited until Hawk was finished eating, and then approached him.

“Could you — I mean to say, would you —” Jairen stuttered, feeling suddenly very shy.

Hawk gave him a level look. “You want to learn how to swing the scimitars, is that right, lad?”

Jairen could only nod. He was having trouble meeting Hawk's

eyes, so awed was he by the stranger.

“Look at me,” commanded Hawk, reaching out to lift Jairen's chin. Jairen did his best to meet Hawk's gaze. “Yes,” said Hawk, under his breath. “The mark does not lie.” Then, louder, he added, “We'll make a swordsman of you, lad. But it will take time, and patience.”

“I have both,” said Jairen firmly. “I want to learn. I *need* to learn.”

“All right, then,” said Hawk. He threw away the core of his tikka fruit. Then he bent down and drew a line in the dirt. “Close your eyes, hold your arms out to the sides, and walk this line,” he said to Jairen.

Jairen looked at him, puzzled. Then he frowned at Fez, whose stifled giggles echoed through the clearing. “I will do it,” he said. “I will do whatever you tell me to do. But when will I learn to thrust and parry with a sword? Being able to walk a line will not save me from murderous orcs or trolls.”

“You are wrong,” said Hawk. “Walking that line — perfecting your balance — is exactly what *will* save you, when the time comes. And you'll take up a sword when I am sure you are ready, and not before.”

Jairen nodded, and tried to swallow his disappointment. He'd hoped that Hawk would teach him to dodge, and flip himself over, and slip this way and that, all while thrusting at enemies with two sharp, flashing scimitars.

“All in good time, lad,” said Hawk, as though he were reading Jairen's mind. “All in good time. For now, show me how well you can walk this line.”

They spent the better part of the morning in the clearing, and Jairen worked harder than he ever had before. He concentrated on every word of Hawk's directions, and pushed himself to perform as perfectly as he thought possible. Fez sat on a fallen log and watched, cheering Jairen on.

“All right, lad,” said Hawk finally. “That's enough for one day. You've done well for a beginner — I think you may have a natural talent for this.”

Jairen grinned tiredly. “Does that mean I'll soon be holding a

real sword?" he asked, throwing down the stick he'd been practicing with.

"Soon, lad," answered Hawk with a smile. "You are clever, and you learn quickly. Just try to remember that patience is one of the keys."

"I know, I know," said Jairen, blushing with pleasure at his teacher's praise. Then, trying to change the subject, he added, "I see that our friend Fez is running short on *his* store of patience." He gestured to where Fez stood, tapping his toe. The fenling's small bag was packed and ready to go.

"Let's begin, then!" said Hawk. He picked up his weapons, slung his cape over his shoulders, and led the way. Jairen and Fez fell into step behind him.

Jairen barely noticed the scenery that they passed through that afternoon; the open plains on his right and the dismal swamps on his left made no impression on him. He was too busy replaying in his mind all that he had learned that morning. Though Hawk's lessons had seemed too simple to be of any use, Jairen knew that he was learning from a master. If Hawk wanted him to touch the tip of his nose with the end of a long stick, eyes closed—well, there must be a reason.

Jairen tried to pay attention to the shifting of his weight and to his balance as he walked. He picked up a stick from the side of the road and carried it, first in one hand and then in the other, pretending that it was a sharp, gleaming scimitar. Fez smirked at him and tried to tease him, but Jairen didn't even notice.

"Now, I shift to the right and lunge forward," Jairen said under his breath, trying out the moves he'd learned that morning. "Shift… lunge — that's it! I feel it now. Hawk, tell me. Is this the right way —" He broke off as he looked up at Hawk, who had stopped short in the middle of the road.

"Look," said Hawk. He stood shading his eyes with one hand, gazing into the distance. He pointed, and Jairen strained his eyes to see what it was that Hawk saw.

"I see it," said Fez. "That column of black smoke, up ahead. It looks like a huge fire!"

"I'm afraid we are too late to help," said Hawk grimly. "But let

us make haste and see if there is anything we can do." He strode in the direction of the smoke, moving so quickly that Fez and Jairen had to trot to keep up.

"What is it, do you think?" Jairen asked Fez after they'd run for a while. They were close to the smoke, now.

"I don't know," said Fez. "But it looks as if Hawk has some idea." Then he stopped suddenly, looking up ahead. "By the beard of my father!" he said. "What — or who has done this awful thing?"

Jairen looked too, and felt sick. The smoke they'd seen had come from the area directly in their path — an area that had, until recently, been a small village. The ruins of several cottages smoldered as dogs ran barking through the wreckage. There were no men in sight, but women and children picked through their scattered belongings, trying to salvage what they could.

Jairen looked at Hawk. His lips were pressed into a hard, white line, and he fingered his scimitar as he stood looking at the scene. "This is the work of the Death Wraiths," he said quietly. "I've seen it before and I had hoped to never see it again." He bent to help a sobbing woman pull her cooking pot out from under a pile of rubble.

"Where are all of the men?" asked Jairen, not at all sure that he wanted to hear the answer.

"Dead, if they're lucky," answered Hawk. "And marching in chains to be sold as slaves, if they're not."

Jairen looked around for Fez, and caught a glimpse of his friend slipping a gold piece into the hands of another village woman. "Isn't there anything else we can do?" he asked.

"This will go on until the Warlock King is put to death," said Hawk. "He and his Death Wraiths know nothing but evil and hatred."

"We must find him, then," said Jairen, "and kill him."

"If it were only so simple," said Hawk. "To kill him one would first have to kill his lieutenant, the Lord of the Death Wraiths. He commands all of the Death Wraiths, and he is a fearsome creature. His weapon is the broadsword Soul Slayer, a demonic weapon forged by the Warlock King himself. It will kill anyone who

touches it.”

“I have heard of this Lord of the Death Wraiths,” said Fez, who had rejoined them. “Is it not true that he can only be destroyed by one who is of the line of ancient kings?”

“I'm afraid that you are right, fenling,” answered Hawk wearily. “ And it may be some time before that will come to pass.”

Jairen looked around once more at the demolished village, with its crying children and helpless women, and the anger rose up in him. “We must press forward!” he cried. “'There is no time to waste in finding the faceless king. We must find him and help him bring peace to this land. This evil must be stopped!”

Chapter Eleven

It was with heavy hearts that Jairen, Hawk, and Fez left the ruined village, and they walked for some time, without talking at all. Jairen could not forget the look he'd seen on one small girl's face; he'd never seen someone so young look so hopeless.

“It's not fair!” he burst out finally. “What did those people do to deserve that?”

“They did nothing,” said Hawk. “They are simple, honest folk. But fairness is not a quality that the Warlock King is known for.”

“Hear me now,” said Jairen, coming to a halt in the middle of the road. “Here before you both, I vow to never abandon my quest until the Warlock King is lain to rest.” His voice trembled with emotion.

Hawk clapped him on the shoulder. “That's the spirit, lad!” he said.

Fez nodded. “And I vow to stay by your side for as long as it takes,” he said solemnly. “Especially now that you're learning some swordplay,” he added with a grin. “I feel safer already.” He mimicked Jairen walking a straight line with his eyes closed, arms waving wildly for balance.

Jairen laughed, shaking his head. Trust Fez to make a joke out of a serious moment, he thought. But he was grateful for the fenling's lighthearted ways. The journey seemed less treacherous with such a clown along.

“Perhaps, Fez,” he said, “when we find the faceless king he will give you a job as a jester at his court!” He laughed. “You'll have to wear one of those caps with bells on it, and — ohhhh, look!” Jairen broke off in the middle of his sentence and pointed ahead.

There, on a large, flat rock by the side of the road, lay four of the most beautiful creatures he'd ever seen. They slept peacefully on the, warm rock, their golden coats glinting in the afternoon sun. Even at rest, their sinewy bodies looked ready to leap and run. The tasseled tail of the largest one twitched as he dozed.

“What are they?” asked Jairen, breathless at the sight of such noble grace.

“Tyens,” answered Hawk. “And they have wandered far from their home in the Eastern continent. Ty'Enoa is their native land.”

“Tyens,” repeated Jairen. “I don't remember Delma telling me of that race.”

“Not many have heard of them,” said Hawk. “Legend has it that they were created when an ancient and very powerful wizard made a spell that crossed a man with a lion. They are true warriors, the Tyens.” He sounded admiring.

“Oh, they're just a bunch of overgrown pets,” said Fez, jealous of the attention the lionmen were getting. “Let's get on with our journey.”

But by then, the Tyens had heard the travelers' voices and had begun to stir. They stretched as cats do, drawing out each muscle to its full length. Then, calmly, they stood and refastened their leather armor. Picking up his broadsword, the largest Tyen looked directly at Jairen and asked, “Friend or foe?” in a voice that was closer to a roar than to human speech. His noble face was like a man's, though his golden beard matched the fur on his body.

“F-friend,” answered Jairen. “At least, I'd like to be friends,” he added under his breath.

“Friends?” asked Fez in a loud whisper. “Who wants to be friends with a flock of fur-faced fools?”

Jairen winced and motioned to Fez to be quiet. But the lionman had heard him, and he gave a low growl. Hawk frowned at the fenling and stepped forward, right palm out in the sign for peace.

The lionman ignored Hawk. “You dishonor me and my clan, fenling,” he said in a deep, rumbling voice. “Your words force me to fight you — to the death, if necessary — to reclaim my honor.”

“T-To the death?” squeaked Fez, his face suddenly white with fear. “I meant no harm by my words, stranger. Please, forgive me and there will be no need to fight.” Jairen noticed that Fez's voice was shaking as he spoke.

“A Tyen does not forgive so easily!” roared the huge creature.

“If you will not — or cannot — fight for yourself, you must name a champion to defend your honor.”

Fez took a step backward, looking as if he longed to run in the opposite direction. Panic showed in his face. Then Hawk spoke. “I will fight for my friend,” he said, “though his words offend me as much as they do you and your race.” He stepped forward, drawing his scimitar.

“Are you not the one that the elves call Akkar T'pau?” asked the Tyen. “Dancer of death?”

“I am he,” answered Hawk.

“You are also know by the Dwarven name Tyr Kraekn, 'he who stalks the shadows,' is this true?” asked the lionman.

“True enough,” said Hawk.

Jairen heard a strange, rumbling noise emerge from the Tyen's throat. The lionman wore an eerie smile, and his eyes were half-closed. The look was familiar to Jairen, but he could not place it for a moment. Then he knew. “He's purring!” he whispered to Fez. “He looks just like the cat that Thurl kept to kill mice in the smithy.

“Finally,” said the Tyen. “A worthy opponent.” He licked his lips. “To the death, human!” he roared.

“To the death,” replied Hawk, and the fight began.

Jairen watched closely at first, fascinated by the total concentration that Hawk displayed. Watching his teacher's sword flash in the sun, Jairen realized how far he was from being able to use such weapons with any skill at all.

The lionman fought with strength and courage, holding his immense broadsword with both hands and swinging it with deadly accuracy. But Hawk ducked and dodged and flipped like an acrobat, thrusting at his opponent at every chance.

The fight went on and on, and Jairen found it harder and harder to watch. Hawk's blade had drawn Tyen blood more than once, and the Tyen had scored several hits as well. Hawk's wounds bled freely, and Jairen feared that his strength would soon fade.

The two seemed evenly matched. Would the battle end with both dead? Jairen found that he was holding his breath as he

watched. Fez stood nearby, fists clenched, muttering under his breath. The rest of the Tyen tribe watched closely as well, low growls erupting from deep in their chests each time either warrior scored a hit.

Just as the fight looked as if it might never end, the Tyen slipped in a puddle of his own blood and fell, gasping, to the ground. Hawk stood over him, scimitar poised for the final thrust. The Tyen looked up at Hawk, meeting his eyes without flinching.

“No, I cannot,” said Hawk after a long moment, dropping his blade to his side. “Such a noble creature does not deserve this death.” He bent to help the Tyen to his feet.

“You show great honor,” gasped the Tyen. “But I am shamed, and must die by my own hand if yours will not do the task.”

“No!” shouted Jairen, without thinking. He couldn't bear to think of such a noble warrior dying in such a way.

“The boy is right,” said Hawk. “You must put this fight behind you and look ahead to a lifetime of other, more worthy battles.”

The other Tyens murmured agreement, and finally their leader nodded. “I thank you,” he said, dropping to one knee. He held his broadsword aloft, offering it to Hawk. “And I vow my tribe's allegiance to you and to any you wish me to protect.”

Hawk reached out and touched the sword, then gestured to the Tyen to stand. “I accept your loyalty,” he said, “and I ask your help with the quest that this man-child follows.” He motioned to Jairen to come forward.

“I want you to go now,” he said to Jairen, looking deep into his eyes. “I must stay here for the moment, but you must journey on. You will travel as before, with Fez your only companion. But know now that you are protected as you journey, by myself and also by these noble creatures.”

“But —” Jairen started. There was so much more that he wanted to ask Hawk. There was so much more he needed to learn. But Hawk had turned from him and was deep in conversation with the Tyen leader.

Jairen looked at Fez. The fenling smiled and shrugged. It was time to move on.

Game Hint

Don't enter the dragon's lair
without a shield.

Chapter Twelve

Jairen and Fez walked for a few minutes without talking. Every so often Jairen would stop and look back to where Hawk stood deep in conversation with the Tyens. “It must be important business he has with the Lionmen,” he said finally. He was trying to understand why it was that Hawk had not stayed with them.

“No doubt,” agreed Fez. He looked at Jairen sympathetically. “But even if not, a warrior like that cannot spend all of his time with a boy and a fenling, you know.”

“I know,” sighed Jairen. “But there's just so much I need to learn from him.”

“I know what he would say,” said Fez. “He'd say that you should practice what you've learned so far, and that the rest will come in due time.”

“You're right again,” said Jairen. He stopped to pick up a long stick from the side of the road. He hefted it, feeling its weight and balance. Then he began to walk again, thrusting and parrying at invisible enemies as he and Fez talked.

“I must admit that I am very ashamed of myself,” admitted the fenling. “To see two such warriors fight a serious battle like that, all because of my loose tongue…”

“Perhaps it will teach you a lesson,” said Jairen hopefully. He sometimes worried that his friend's sharp tongue would one day be the end of both of them.

“It might,” said Fez, looking doubtful.

Jairen laughed. “Well, I certainly learned a lesson from that battle,” he said. “I learned something about what courage really means. Not from the way they fought, though they were both courageous. It was the way the fight ended. Hawk showed such honor by sparing the Tyen's life — and the Tyen showed courage by accepting the outcome of the battle. Wasn't it incredible how —”

Jairen had been thinking so hard, and talking so fast, that he had forgotten to watch where he was walking. He looked down to

see that he was ankle deep in cool, clear water. Fez was standing behind him, on the bank of the river they had come to. The fenling was doubled over with laughter.

“You should see yourself!” he hooted. “Just standing there in the river, talking about courage and honor—”

“Very funny, Fez,” said Jairen. “Why didn't you tell me we were coming to a river?”

“What, and miss the fun?” asked Fez. “Besides, I couldn't get a word in. You were just too busy talking.”

Jairen reached down, scooped a palmful of water, and splashed it up at Fez. “You — you *fenling*, you!” he said, laughing. “What river is this, anyway?”

“It's the Upper Tyre,” said Fez, consulting his map. “It flows from the north, and it is the border between Westland and Kal Zathynn.”

“Kal Zathynn!” said Jairen. “That's where Gatekeeper Mountain is! We must be getting close.”

“Closer, my friend,” said Fez. “But not close. We still have much journeying to do, and some of it will be hard going. ”

“Let's be on our way, then,” said Jairen. “Where is the nearest bridge?” He shaded his eyes to look across the wide, shining river. The opposite shore was no more than a hazy blur from where he stood.

“Bridge?” asked Fez. “Ha! There is no bridge, lad.”

“Then how do we cross?” asked Jairen.

“We walk,” said Fez. “The river is wide, but it is not very deep, if what I have heard of it is true.”

“Not very deep!” cried Jairen. “I hope not. We are not very tall!” He thought back to the cool, still pools in the forest he'd played in so long ago. He'd splashed in them often enough, on a hot summer's day, but he could hardly say that he knew how to swim. Still, it seemed as if they had no choice if they were to enter the kingdom of Kal Zathynn.

Jairen looked again across the river, then looked at Fez and nodded. “All right, then,” he said. “We'll walk.” He swung his bundle up to the top of his head, and holding it there with one

hand, he took a few steps further into the river. The water still licked at his ankles, no higher.

“Come on, Fez,” he said.

Fez stood on the shore, looking indecisive. “We fenlings have no love for water,” he said. “None of us can swim, or even float. If I slip and fall I'll sink like a stone.”

“No, you won't,” said Jairen. “I'll save you.” He'd already forgotten that he'd been at all afraid of the wide river. There was no way he was going to part with Fez now. “Come on!” he said again, a little impatiently.

“Oh, all right,” said Fez, stepping gingerly into the swirling stream.

Jairen waited for him to catch up, and then walked slowly next to him, feeling for each foothold as he pushed against the slight current. The water rose as they walked further into the river. Now it was halfway up his calves; now it was at his knees. When it rose to his thighs, he felt a twinge of fear, but he kept walking.

The current grew stronger as the water rose, and soon it took all the strength that he had to push his way forward. “Hold on,” he said to Fez, and Fez nodded and grabbed him by the elbow. The water was almost up to the fenling's neck, Jairen noticed, and the fear showed in Fez's eyes.

Just then, Jairen stumbled over a rock on the river bottom, lost his footing, and began to slide downstream, pulled by the current. Fez held on tighter, and both of them struggled to regain position before they were swept away. Jairen tried to stay calm as his feet and hands worked frantically, fighting the suddenly-too-strong current.

Finally he was able to get a toehold in the sandy bottom. He stood still for a moment, catching his breath. Fez loosened his grip on Jairen's arm, but did not let it go. “That was close,” said Jairen.

“It was,” agreed Fez. “But we're past the worst part now,” he added.

Jairen looked ahead. Sure enough, the opposite shore looked almost close enough to touch. He waded forward, pulling Fez along. He was impatient to be on solid ground. And soon enough, he was.

“*Aaah!”* he said, flopping down on the shore. “We made it! Let's just lie here for a moment.” He'd chosen a wide, black rock to lie on, and it was warm from the sun's heat. Fez sat down beside him.

“I don't know,” said the fenling. “Something feels wrong. Something smells wrong.” Fez stroked the smooth rock, looking troubled.

Jairen sat up, sniffed, and nodded. “I know what you mean,” he said. “There is an odd smell in the air. And I'll be glad to help you find out what it is, as soon as I take a short nap.” He lay down again and shut his eyes.

And then the rock moved. Jairen's eyes flew open. “What—?” he shouted.

“Get off!” yelled Fez. “It's a dragon!”

Jairen jumped from the “rock”, which he now saw was just the tip of the dragon's tail, and drew his short sword. “Get back, Fez,” he cried. “Into the woods there!” He gestured toward the dark forest that rose from the river's edge. “I'll hold him off.”

Jairen was cold with fear, but he felt ready to fight. He remembered Hawk's battle with the Tyen, and recognized now the exhilarating feeling that the two warriors must have had. “The stronger the enemy, the better the battle,” he said to himself. He focused on the dragon, which was wheeling around to face him.

It was shiny black—from its evil grinning snout to its heavy weaponlike tail. The dragon looked as if it were dressed in the finest armor. It whipped its tail back and forth like an angry cat as it walked, lumbering, toward Jairen.

“It's as big as a rich man's house!” muttered Jairen to himself. “But it must have a weak spot. All I have to do is find it.” He scanned the dragon's body as it came toward him. Then the dragon smiled. The smile was the most horrifying sight Jairen had ever seen. The dragon's white teeth were the size of Hawk's scimitars, and its flame- red tongue just showed between them.

Jairen wondered for a moment why the dragon was smiling. Then he turned to look behind himself, and he knew. He was cornered. Huge boulders hemmed him in on three sides, the dragon on the fourth. He looked back at the dragon just in time to

see it draw a long, deep breath.

He knew what was coming next. Fire.

Chapter Thirteen

Jairen tried to stay calm. “Balance,” he reminded himself. “Balance is the key. Balance, and patience. If I can keep my head about me, I can win this battle.” He dug his feet into the sandy ground and stood firm as the dragon drew nearer.

He ran his gaze over the dragon's body, looking for the most likely weak spot. The dragon loomed over him, ready to breathe fire. Jairen dodged its falling feet, ran between its treelike legs, and thrust his short sword deep into its underbelly.

The dragon roared in pain, and the sound was like thunder. Jairen resisted the temptation to clap his hands over his ears. He thrust again, jumping back as the dragon's tail lashed the air near his head.

The dragon was furious now. It roared again, snapping at the air with its fearsome jaw. Its eyes rolled back in its head as it craned its neck this way and that, trying to locate its enemy.

Jairen was breathing hard. He spoke to himself as he dodged the dragon's tail. “All right, now, you've scored two hits. Good! Be patient, now, and keep moving,” he whispered under his breath. He thrust again, under the dragon's right front arm. “Its heart — if it has one — must be somewhere near this spot,” he said to himself.

The dragon's roars got louder, and its movement more frantic. It stamped the earth as if trying to smash the tiny creature that was stinging it.

It's trying to crush me just as I would crush a stinging spring-fly, thought Jairen, remembering the pests that drove him mad every spring with their buzzing and their bites.

He ran to the back of the dragon and gave it a blow on the tail. The dragon turned to bite at Jairen, but by the time it had moved its huge body around in a full circle, Jairen had gotten out of the way.

“Good work, lad!” Jairen looked up to see Fez sitting on a high rock. He looked like a spectator at a jousting match, watching

happily as his champion played at battle. “Watch out!” warned Fez, and Jairen spun around just in time to see the dragon advancing again, its yellow eyes gleaming with hatred.

Jairen felt his heart lurch with fear, but he held his ground. He knew that his small size was for once in his favor: If he was patient enough the lizard would tire before it could kill him. He saw the creature's huge, glossy sides heaving with the deep breaths it was taking. This fight was not an easy one for the giant beast.

Jairen gripped his sword and ran at the dragon's belly, thrusting again and again. He ignored the beast's earthshaking roars, paying the wild sounds no mind as he concentrated on staying balanced.

His own breath came harder now. The battle seemed to be going on forever. It felt like hours since he had waded up out of the cool water and collapsed unthinkingly on the smooth black rock. Jairen wiped his forehead, trying to keep the sweat out of his eyes. Was he going to tire even faster than the dragon?

But the dragon was moving more slowly now, Jairen was certain. Streams of deep purple blood flowed from its wounds, staining the ground as it soaked into the sand. The color of it was startling to Jairen, and the smell of the blood (his face was smeared with it by now) was terrible.

“It's like the spray of the winker-bug,” he said out loud, thinking of the nasty smelling juice that such insects gave off. He remembered picking one up once, after finding it under a rock. Thurl hadn't let him into the house for three days afterwards.

“Zooks!” he said suddenly, as the dragon's tail clubbed him on the head and sent him flying. He was definitely getting tired, forgetting to concentrate — and now he was paying for it. He lay on the ground, trying to catch his breath.

“Jairen!” yelled Fez. His voice sounded tiny and distant to Jairen, who was trying to shake the dizziness from his head. “Behind you!” Fez shouted.

Jairen looked up, just in time to see the dragon's front foot coming down on top of him. And then he was pinned. Caught between the dragon's foot and a boulder the size of a horse. The dragon began to take another deep breath. Jairen closed his eyes

for a moment, still fighting the dizziness that overwhelmed him. I'm about to be roasted alive, he thought. He struggled, but it was no use. The dragon had him trapped. Its grin was wider than ever, even though the pain showed clearly in its eyes.

I've angered it, thought Jairen. And now it's going to punish me for that. He held his breath, waiting to see what the dragon would do next. It snorted at him, and its breath was as hot as the air in the smithy.

The dragon's mouth opened wider, and a small lick of flame shot out. Jairen ducked, as best he could, and the flame went by. He felt the heat of it as it scorched his tunic. He smelled the odor of burning fibers. The dragon let out another short burst of flame, and another.

It's teasing me, thought Jairen. It knows I'm caught and it knows that it can incinerate me whenever it wants to. It's just playing with me now, as a cat would play with a mouse. His heart was pounding. He thought wildly, trying to figure out how to escape. He twisted and turned, but the dragon only held him tighter.

Jairen knew that Fez must be watching still. Unless — could he have run for help? Jairen tried to turn his head toward the rock where he'd last seen the fenling, but it was no use. I can't wait for help, anyway, thought Jairen. I'm going to have to use my brains to get myself out of this. He cast his mind back, thinking over all that he'd learned since starting his journey.

He'd done his best to fight as Hawk would have—he knew that. The weapons master would have been glad to see the way he used what he'd learned. But Hawk had never told him what to do in a situation like this one.

The dragon began to draw a deep breath. Jairen met its eyes, which were now shining with fury. The breath went on and on, and the dragon's chest puffed up larger and larger. Jairen knew that when the dragon began to let that breath out, the flames would be like nothing he'd yet seen.

He thought faster. Lakmir! What had Lakmir taught him that he could use now? He thought back to that day beneath the banty tree, and went over the spells that the old mage had taught him. Surely one of the fire spells would be perfect!

“Yes!” cried Jairen aloud. “That's it!” He spoke quickly now, muttering the words he'd rehearsed so long ago. The spell to reverse fire.

The dragon's mouth was open wider than ever before. Jairen could see deep into its yawning red gullet, and the sight was a terrible one. And then a wall of flame began to swell from deep inside. Jairen, trembling, continued to speak the ancient words that Lakmir had taught him.

The flames licked out at Jairen, singeing his eyebrows, but still he spoke. And then, finally, the heat began to subside. The flame was turning back, flooding back into the dragon's mouth! The flame was now hotter than ever, and it roared deep into the dragon's throat, moving even faster than it had before.

The dragon shrieked a terrible shriek. It let go of Jairen and rolled over, clutching at its stomach with all four clawed feet. Its tail thrashed, sending boulders tumbling. Jairen scrambled to his feet and ran for cover, dodging the falling rocks.

Panting, he dropped to the ground. He watched the dragon writhe beneath him, and felt almost sorry for the huge creature. What pain it must be in!

“Quite a case of indigestion that lizard's got!” said Fez into Jairen's ear. Jairen jumped.

Fez smiled. “Well done, lad,” he said. “Our friend Hawk would be proud, and the old wizard would be, too.”

Jairen smiled tiredly. “I thought I was going to be roasted like a shippu at a troll's picnic,” he admitted. He looked down at the dragon. Its tail was still thrashing, though the rest of it was now lying still. He shook his head and turned to Fez. “Let's be on our way,” he said. “I've no wish to watch the creature die.”

Game Hint

Find a gem in the lake area, then check to see if it fits into a secret hole in the righthand bookcase in the library.

Chapter Fourteen

Fez led the way, down the road and into a cool, dark forest. “This is the Morryth Woods,” he said. “I think it would be best if we could get through it before nightfall, and make camp on the other side.”

Jairen nodded tiredly, in no mood to argue. He felt drained from his battle with the dragon, but he felt exhilarated, too. What a victory! As he followed Fez through the woods, he replayed the fight over and over again in his mind.

He knew that there were things he could have done differently, moves he could have made that would have helped make the battle shorter. But overall, he felt that he had done well. His first dragon!

Jairen was barely aware of the path they took through the woods, trusting that Fez knew the way. This forest was neither dark and gloomy like the one where they'd met the trolls, nor magical like the one where the elves lived. It reminded him of the forest near where he'd grown up, and he felt comfortable and unafraid as he walked through it.

So comfortable did he feel that he nearly fell asleep as he walked, only coming to his senses when he stumbled upon a rock. Fez noticed and laughed. “It's no wonder you're tired, friend. First you have to drag a fenling across the widest river on Tyragon, then you have to slay a dragon. But keep the pace, lad. We'll be through the forest soon, and then we can make camp safely.”

To keep Jairen awake, Fez began to sing, composing as he went along. He sang of Jairen's fight with the dragon, and his verses made the encounter sound like the battle to end all battles.

As valiant Jairen held his ground,

The dragon fell without a sound.

The lad thrust here and parried there,

Let all the evil ones beware!

Jairen blushed. “Fez, stop!” he said. “You're making too much of it.”

“Come now, lad,” said Fez. “You've heard the songs that the wandering minstrels sing. It's the style to make it all sound grand. And besides, you *did* give that dragon a truly terrible fight.”

Jairen shrugged and held up his hands, laughing. “All right, then,” he said. “Go on with your singing.” And to the sound of Fez's song, they continued on through the forest.

After they'd walked for some time, the woods began to thin and Jairen realized that they had come to the other side. “At last,” he said. “Fez, look. The sun will be setting soon. Let's make camp here at the edge of the forest.” Jairen couldn't remember ever feeling so tired.

Fez nodded. “This looks like a good place to sleep,” he agreed. “Why don't you rest for a few moments while I gather firewood?”

Jairen smiled gratefully. “That sounds wonderful,” he said. He leaned against the trunk of a tree and then slid down until he was sitting comfortably. He was asleep before Fez had left his side.

“Ho there, man-child!”

Jairen woke with a start. “What —?” he asked, looking around to see who had spoken. It was a tall, blonde man, one of a small group who stood clustered around the tree where Jairen had lain napping.

The man smiled at Jairen. “You look tired, lad,” he said. “And hungry, too. If you'll let us tarry here, we'll share our supper with you.”

Jairen smiled back and gestured for them to sit. “There's room for all,” he said. “My friend is gathering wood for a fire and will be back soon.” The mention of supper made his stomach grumble.

He looked around at the faces of the men, and suddenly realized that he had missed being among his own kind. He enjoyed Fez's company, and had even come to love the fenling like a brother, but he'd had his fill of Tyens and dwarves and elves — and, most of all, dragons. It was good to be with men.

They sat and talked for some time, waiting for Fez to return. They spoke of the weather and of the landscape that they traveled

through. Jairen, still drowsy from his nap, felt safe and comfortable in the company of the men, even though they were strangers.

They looked different than the men had where Jairen came from, but their appearance was pleasing. They were light in complexion, and they all had almond-shaped eyes of the palest blue — a blue so icy that it almost looked silver. They smiled and laughed easily as they talked.

When Fez rejoined them, the men helped to build a fire and then broke out their supplies of bread and dried meat, urging Fez and Jairen to help themselves. When they had all eaten their fill, they leaned back and talked some more.

“Gatekeeper Mountain is still a long way off,” said one of the men to Jairen. “And you've been traveling for so long already. Perhaps we could show you a shorter route.”

Jairen looked closely at the man. He couldn't remember telling them that he was on his way to Gatekeeper Mountain, but he must have done so. He was so tired that it was hard to remember just what he'd said and what he hadn't. He noticed Fez flashing him a curious look, but he ignored it. “A shorter route?” he asked. “But that would be too wonderful for words!”

“I see no such route on my map,” said Fez, a little suspiciously. “We are already following the most direct path.”

The man ignored Fez and directed his words to Jairen. “We can start at dawn,” he said. “You'll find that our way is much easier, besides being faster. You'll arrive stronger and better prepared to carry out your quest.”

Quest? Jairen was sure that he hadn't told these men of his quest. It was not something he discussed with strangers. But they must have simply guessed that a quest was the driving force behind his journey to Gatekeeper.

Fez put his hand on Jairen's arm. “Can I speak to you for a moment, privately?” he asked.

Jairen shook off the fenling's hand. “Fez, please. You're being rude again. Do you want these men to take offense as the Tyen did?”

Fez shook his head. “I want nothing of the kind,” he said. And

then, lowering his voice, he added so only Jairen could hear, “but these men — if men they are — do not have the same sense of honor that the Tyens do. I would not so easily trust them.”

“So, lad,” said the man who had been doing most of the talking, “will you join us? You'll be at Gatekeeper within two days' time if you do.”

“When did you tell him that you journey to Gatekeeper?” hissed Fez into Jairen's ear. “I warn you, don't trust them!”

“What are you telling him?” asked one of the other men threateningly, getting up from his seat by the fire to approach the fenling. He drew a shining dagger from his belt. “If he wants to come with us, he will, and no fenling will stop him!”

Jairen's eyes grew wide. How could this man threaten his friend? “What are you doing?” he shouted, leaping at the man and knocking the dagger from his hand.

“Back!” yelled Fez. “Look out!”

But his warning was unnecessary. Jairen watched with terror as the man's face shimmered and changed. His nose flattened and his lips grew thin as his eyes lost any blue tint they'd had and began to glint pure silver in the firelight. His body changed, too. Scales replaced the flowing blonde hair, and clawed feet appeared where human hands had been. A spiked tail sprung to life and twitched menacingly.

“Changelings!” said Fez. “And now we see their true form.” He took up a flaming stick from the fire and thrust it at the lizardlike creature.

Jairen looked around and saw that all the men had been transformed into scaly beasts. Quickly, without even thinking, he drew his sword and ran toward the closest one, catching it unaware and killing it in seconds. Another one ran at him, and he dodged first and then thrust, his sword flashing silver just before it plunged into the changeling's body.

Fez had destroyed the first changeling with his flaming branch, and now the others, seeing their comrades fall, ran shrieking into the woods. The fight was over almost before it had begun.

“Fez,” gasped Jairen. “I'm so sorry. How could I have trusted

those strangers? I would have followed them anywhere, but you saved me. I owe you my life."

Fez looked deep into Jairen's eyes, serious for once. "We're even now," he said. "For you saved my life on the very day we met." He reached out to embrace Jairen. "Well fought, brother," he said. "Well fought."

Chapter Fifteen

It was night now. The moons shone in the sky: Traal was just rising. They were back in the forest again, though Jairen had no idea how they had gotten there or why. He trudged along behind Fez, stumbling over roots and pushing away the scratchy brambles that arched over the faint path they followed.

“Where are we going, Fez?” he asked. It was hard to get the words out. He was tired, so very, very tired.

“Just follow me,” answered Fez, his voice sounding faint. “Follow me.”

Jairen closed his eyes and swayed for a moment, feeling as though he might fall. Then he took a deep breath, set his shoulders, and continued to walk. “Are we almost there, Fez?” he asked, though he was not even really sure what he meant by “there” — did he mean Gatekeeper Mountain, their final destination, or did he just mean a place to lie down and get the sleep he craved so badly?

“Almost there,” answered Fez, his voice even fainter than before. It sounded more like an echo than like the fenling's true voice. “Almost there,” he said again.

The path opened out into a small clearing, lit by silver moonlight. Jairen stopped short and squinted, trying to make sense of what he saw. As his vision adapted to the light, he reached for the sword at his side. For there, standing with arms crossed in the middle of the glade, stood a mighty warrior.

“A barbarian!” said Jairen to himself. He'd heard tales of this race of men that lived in the frozen wastelands of the north. Warlike and proud, they left their home for only one purpose: to make battle. Jairen drew a deep breath and took a closer look at the man.

The soldier wore a breastplate of hard, blue metal, and his brawny arms were encircled by bands of the same stuff. He carried a mace in one huge hand — a heavy, spiked club that looked, to Jairen, as though it could do much damage. In the other he held a gleaming long-sword, at least as long as Fez was tall.

Jairen, still hidden in the shadows at the edge of the clearing, shifted his weight. A twig snapped, and the warrior came to attention. “Who goes there?” he roared, peering into the dark woods. “State your business!” Jairen gulped.

He had no wish to make battle with this huge man, but it seemed as though a fight might be unavoidable. He stepped forward. “I am Jairen,” he said. “And I go in peace.”

“Peace?” roared the Barbarian. “I do not know the meaning of the word.” He lifted his sword in a challenge. “If you will pass this way, you must earn your passage. Stand and fight, man-child!”

Jairen strengthened his grip on his sword. He lifted his chin and squared his shoulders. If he was called upon to fight, he would fight. And he would do his best. Quickly, he ran over all that Hawk had taught him. He thought, too, of his battle with the dragon. “Why, if I killed a creature of that size,” he said to himself, “perhaps I have a chance against this man, no matter how great a warrior he is.”

And then, giving a loud battle-cry, he ran into the clearing and attacked. The barbarian, taken by surprise, lost his balance for a split second. Jairen thrust with his sword, dealing the huge man a glancing blow.

The barbarian recovered his footing quickly, and, more angry than ever, he charged at Jairen, swinging his mace. “You dare to sting me, you little horsefly?” he shouted as he came. “I'll swat you and squash you flat!”

Jairen stood his ground until the last possible moment, and then ducked, easily avoiding the clumsy weapon that the barbarian swung at him. Once again, his size and speed were in his favor. He stopped for a moment to regain his balance, then ran at his enemy again, thrusting with his sword.

“*Aaaargh!”* shouted the man, looking down at his arm. A trickle of red ran down it. Jairen had drawn the first blood. The barbarian was enraged. He gnashed his teeth and rolled his eyes, stomping around the clearing like a madman.

Jairen felt an odd sense of peace. He was beginning to realize that the barbarian's temper was going to work against him. The more enraged the warrior became, the worse his aim and balance

were. Jairen knew that if he could only keep his head about him, he might have a chance.

Just then, though, the barbarian ran at him with full force, swinging his long-sword in circles around his head and shouting in a strange language. Jairen panicked for a moment, not sure which way to dodge. He stumbled, and fell. The barbarian's eyes blazed as he stood over Jairen, ready to deal the final blow.

Jairen tucked his body into a small, round ball, rolled between the barbarian's legs, and then sprang up behind him, ready to fight some more. “Ha!” he cried. But it was a mistake to gloat.

The barbarian was so angry now that Jairen could see the blood-lust in his eyes. It was clear that he wanted nothing more than to kill Jairen, and that the method no longer mattered. The huge man dropped his weapons and reached out with his bare hands, ready to wrestle Jairen to the ground and finish the job.

Jairen's eyes widened in fear. Was this the end? The barbarian grabbed his shoulders before he could dart aside. Just then, there was a brilliant flash of light. Jairen shielded his eyes, and the barbarian let go his grip to do the same.

The light subsided, and the clearing was once again lit only by the moon. But now, Jairen and the barbarian were no longer alone. Standing before them was a tall, thin figure, cloaked in deepest black. No face was visible, yet Jairen somehow knew that the face would not be a kind one. He sensed evil, almost as if it were an odor that filled the clearing.

The figure lifted a hand and pointed a long finger at Jairen. “Your quest is over, manling!” it said, in a voice filled with doom. A bolt of lightning crackled from the figure's hand, and Jairen ducked. The barbarian moved forward, standing in front of Jairen as though to shield him.

Jairen looked at him questioningly. The barbarian looked back with a steady gaze. “I was your enemy, yes,” he said, as if in answer to Jairen's unspoken question. “But this evil spirit is enemy to all honorable men. And if it threatens you, then I am now your comrade. United, we may have a chance to rid the world of such menace! Allies, then?”

Jairen could hardly believe his ears, but the barbarian was

obviously sincere. He nodded, unable to speak for a moment. Then he found his tongue. “Allies.”

The battle that followed was like no other that Jairen had ever seen, or even heard tell of. The spirit fought with spells and incantations, calling up fire and lightning, wind and rain. Hailstones rattled on the barbarian's armor as he struggled to destroy the evil that filled the clearing. Jairen fought with both sword and spells, using every trick he'd learned from both Hawk and Lakmir.

The spirit seemed surrounded by some kind of force shield that the barbarian's weapons could not penetrate. Jairen's spells had some effect, but they were weak in the face of such awesome magic. The spirit was undaunted. It advanced slowly but surely, battering its enemies with the force of pure evil.

And then the barbarian fell, surrounded by a black cloud of death sent from the fingertips of the spirit. Jairen bent over him, forgetting that the man had so recently been his enemy. He sat and cradled the huge head in his lap, doing his best to comfort the brave warrior.

The spirit advanced ever closer, but Jairen ignored him now. A man was dying, and Jairen could not save him, but he could at least give him some peace. Jairen reached out to hold the barbarian's hand, whispering words of comfort as the warrior sighed and moaned.

“Foolish manling,” sneered the spirit. It had drawn very close to Jairen by now. “You have bought your own death, as well!” A huge, shining battle-axe appeared in the air, swinging side to side. No hand held it, yet it moved without stopping, closer and closer to Jairen's head.

Game Hint

To answer the Sphinx's riddles, you'll need the map, the horseshoe, the mirror, the bellows, the broom, and the skull.

Chapter Sixteen

Jairen gripped the dying barbarian's hand even harder as the axe began to fall. “We'll die together, you and I,” he said. “Comrades in arms.” He closed his eyes, waiting for the final blow.

And then there was another flash of brilliant light, and Jairen was lying on the ground, not in the woods at all but on a wide open plain. He was propped against a boulder, and he lay there with his breath coming in ragged gasps as he tried to make sense of what was happening to him. He felt strangely powerful, and he was tingling from head to foot.

Fez knelt beside him, mopping his brow. “Are you all right, friend?” he asked. “You frightened me, calling out in your sleep so wildly.”

“Sleep?” asked Jairen. “I've had no sleep in days. But where are we, and what has happened to the barbarian?” Then he heard a cough, and he looked up. A tall, thin figure stood before him, cloaked in gray. Lakmir.

“The barbarian is safe,” said the wizard, “and so are you. It was a dream you had — a dream, and a test.”

“What do you mean?” asked Jairen. That terrible battle only a nightmare? It had felt so real! And what could Lakmir mean by calling it a test?

“I sent you that dream, lad,” said the wizard gently. “But your behavior in the dream was up to you. And I am most proud of the way you fought your battle.” He smiled gently at Jairen.

“But I didn't win!” cried Jairen. “How can you be proud of me? The spirit killed the barbarian, and it was about to kill me as well while I knelt beside my friend.”

“No warrior could have prevailed against that evil spirit,” said Lakmir. “We all have limits to our power. There are times when the greatest magic and the most boundless strength cannot overcome the enemy. But you found within yourself the most important qualities that a noble man can have. Compassion. Compassion, and love.”

Jairen looked wide-eyed at the wizard. “You're saying that I did the right thing?” he asked.

“You did the right thing,” answered Lakmir quietly, meeting Jairen's gaze. “You are no longer a boy. Today, I call you a man!” He reached into the folds of his cloak and pulled out a long-sword. “And now we have a real battle to fight. You'll need this. Take it, keep it, and use it well.” He handed the sword to Jairen, hilt first.

Jairen wrapped his hand around the hilt. It fit his grip perfectly. The sword was beautiful. Its gleaming edge looked sharp enough to cut through a troll's armor, and the blade was beautifully engraved with vines and flowers of the most delicate artistry. “F-for me?” asked Jairen, overcome by the gift. Fez had drawn closer to examine the workmanship.

“Yes,” said Lakmir. “It was meant for you to have this weapon. It's name is K'lynn T'ar, or Gentle Avenger, and it was forged by elves, long, long ago.”

“I thank you,” said Jairen, bowing to Lakmir. “I will treasure it. Now, where is this battle you spoke of?”

“Your friend Hawk fights as we speak,” answered Lakmir. “He and the Tyens are surrounded by a band of harpies, and need your help.”

“Let's not waste a moment, then!” cried Jairen. “Are you ready, Fez?”

“Ready!” answered Fez, hitching up his trousers and sticking his dagger into his belt. “I'll follow where you lead, my friend.”

“Touch the sword and you'll be there,” said Lakmir. “Good-bye for now — and may you fight well!”

His voice faded as Jairen touched his sword, and the plain where they stood shimmered and disappeared. Jairen staggered, feeling dizzy as the landscaped shifted and changed. And then he and Fez were standing high on a rocky mountaintop. Angry shrieks drifted up to them from a ledge far below.

Jairen strained his eyes, trying to see where the noises came from.

“It's the harpies,” said Fez. “That awful din. I can't stand it!” He put his hands over his ears.

“Look!” said Jairen, pointing. “There's Hawk, fighting them off, with the Tyens beside him. We've got to get down there!” He started off, picking his way down the steep, rubble-strewn path. Fez followed.

As they drew closer, Jairen got a better look at the harpies. They were horrifying creatures. Each had the head and torso of a shrieking madwoman, but they flapped about on enormous wings.

They dove at Hawk and the Tyens, claws first, wild hair flying in the wind. They attacked in wave after wave, giving their enemies no time to rest or change weapons.

Jairen held his new sword high and wished a silent wish. Let me be enough of a warrior to be truly deserving of this blade! he thought. Then, aloud, he shouted to Fez. “Let's go!”

They ran down onto the ledge where the others stood fighting, and joined the battle. Fez jabbed quickly with his dagger each time a harpy drew close, while Jairen swung the long-sword in deadly circles. Jairen watched Fez closely out of the comer of his eye, afraid that his small friend would be plucked up and carried off by one of the beasts.

There was no time to talk or make battle plans, but Jairen saw Hawk smile broadly at him, welcoming him to the fight. The Tyens fought like cats, jumping from rock to rock and swiping at the harpies with sharpened swords.

Jairen loved the way the new sword felt in his hands. It seemed to have some magical skills; it leapt and thrust almost without his direction. He roved over the rocky ledges, fighting off the harpies as they dove at him. Now and then, when he could find the presence of mind, Jairen uttered a short incantation. He summoned fire, and hailstones, and great winds, and he found that his powers had increased tenfold since Lakmir had sent him on his dream-quest.

The harpies fell back, less sure now of victory. Still, they swooped and dove, but there were fewer of them and they fought with less ferocity. Jairen paused in his fight to bend and wipe his blade — the thick, greenish blood of the harpies was everywhere.

Just then, he heard a whooshing noise behind him. He straightened and whirled to face his attacker, but he was too late.

The harpy was about to sink its claws deep into his chest, when suddenly, Fez appeared out of nowhere and pushed Jairen out of the creature's way.

The harpy changed course, not caring which of her enemies she pounced upon. Jairen watched as she rushed at Fez, chasing him toward the rim of the ledge. Fez dodged and ran, trying to avoid her claws. Jairen stared in horror as he drew nearer and nearer to the edge.

And then, Fez was gone, and the harpy whirled and flew off in the opposite direction. Jairen jumped up and ran toward the place where he'd last seen his friend. “No!” he cried out, looking down, down, down into the deep chasm. Fez was nowhere in sight.

Game Hint

To get past the Firedrake, use the sphere that froze the lake. Once the fire is gone, the Firedrake will disappear.

Chapter Seventeen

Jairen strained his eyes, trying to look down into the depths of the chasm. Wisps of fog drifted here and there, making it hard to see. The gorge was so deep that the trees standing at the bottom of it looked like nothing more than tiny bushes. Boulders that must have been the size of houses looked like pebbles. And the river that rushed through the canyon looked like the smallest trickle.

“Fez!” cried Jairen. “Fez, answer me!” Jairen was desperate. It had all happened so suddenly, and now Fez was gone. He examined the edge of the gorge where he stood, trying to find some way to climb down into it. What if Fez was alive and clinging to a bush, waiting to be saved?

But there was no way to travel down the steep and rocky cliffs — and, truly, there was little hope that Fez was alive at all. “Fez!” called Jairen once more, his voice catching. Except for a faint echo, there was no answer. Jairen's cry was swallowed by the ravine.

Jairen felt a familiar sensation, one that he hadn't felt in some time. Tears were pricking at his eyes, his face felt hot, and there was a lump in his throat so big that he could hardly swallow. But this time it wasn't a teasing bully that was making him cry.

Jairen sank to his knees, barely feeling the comforting arm that encircled his shoulders.

“The battle is over,” said Hawk quietly. “And it was well fought. Do not mourn your friend, as he died a warrior's death. He fought the noble fight.”

“He saved my life!” said Jairen. “And he lost his own while he was doing it. He was the best friend I ever had. How can I go on?”

“Death is a part of life,” answered Hawk. “We can't let it stop us. Those who still live must go on with life, living it to the fullest.”

“That's easy for you to say!” said Jairen angrily. “You hardly knew Fez. But I knew him well, and I-I loved him. And now he's gone, and I'm all alone!” The tears came in a flood now. Jairen was

ashamed. He was supposed to be a man now, and here he was, crying like a small child. But he felt so lost, so lonely.

Hawk wiped Jairen's tears gently, with the edge of his tunic. “Come now, lad. You're not alone — I'll be with you. And believe me, I have lost more beloved friends in battle than you can imagine. I know what you're feeling.”

Jairen sniffed, trying to regain control over his tears. “It's — it's just that I never had a friend like Fez before,” he said. “I've always felt like an outsider, like one who doesn't fit in. An orphan boy, with a strange birthmark.” He paused, trying to gather his thoughts. “Delma loved me, I suppose — but she loved all babies. And Thurl? He took me in for practical reasons. He needed an apprentice.

“But since Fez has been with me, I've begun to learn a lot more about who I am, about what I can do if I put my mind to it.”

Hawk nodded, looking deep into Jairen's eyes and listening with full concentration.

“I think that it was partly Fez's friendship that gave me the strength to learn those things. He never laughed at me, yet he never let me take myself too seriously, either. He was just my—my friend.” Jairen gave a long sigh.

“And he's gone now,” said Hawk gently. “But you're still here, and he would want you to carry on. He would want you to remember his friendship, and to remember that you are one who is worthy of such friendship.” Hawk paused, and his eyes twinkled. “And he'd probably be wondering whether it was time for dinner yet, and looking around for something to eat, am I right?”

Jairen gave a small smile. “You're right,” he answered. “About all of it.”

“Well then,” said Hawk, turning to include the Tyens in the conversation. “Shall we find a spot to sit and rest for a time?”

The Tyens growled their agreement, and soon a campfire had been started and some food produced from pockets and bundles. After he'd eaten his fill, Jairen leaned comfortably against the warm flank of one of the Tyens and stared into the fire.

“I'm not sure I want to go on with my quest,” he said quietly. “There just doesn't seem to be much point to it all anymore, now

that I've lost Fez."

The Tyen's tail twitched, but he said nothing. Hawk leaned forward and gazed across the fire into Jairen's eyes. "Whether or not you continue your quest is up to you," he said. "And you must make that decision for yourself. But I promise you, Jairen, that there is a point to it all."

Jairen looked up to meet Hawk's gaze. "How can the journey of one boy make any difference?" he asked. "I don't see what I can do about the evil that's overrunning the land. I can't even keep my best friend safe!"

"I can only ask you to trust my word," said Hawk. "Your quest is important."

Jairen nodded. "If I cannot trust you, who can I trust?" he said. "I suppose I must go on, then." He spoke in a flat voice.

"There is something I think you should know," said Hawk carefully. "Something that may give you a renewed sense of what this quest is about."

"What is it?" asked Jairen. He sounded alert again, curious.

"Something Lakmir told me," said Hawk. "Do you remember the village we saw, so many days ago, when you had just begun your quest? The one that had been destroyed by the Death Wraiths?"

Jairen nodded. "Yes," he said. "I'll never forget it."

Hawk's mouth tightened. "And do you remember that I told you I'd seen their work, in another village, many years before?"

Jairen nodded again.

"Well," said Hawk. "Lakmir told me that the ruined village I saw so long ago was the village of your birth."

Jairen gasped, and his face turned white. "And did they — ? I mean — my parents?" he asked.

"Yes," said Hawk. "It was there and then that your parents were killed, murdered by the minions of the Warlock King."

Jairen stood up and turned his face to the sky. His fists were clenched at his sides. "Hear me!" he shouted. "I will avenge the memory of my parents—and of my fallen comrade!" The tears

poured freely down his face, but he was not ashamed of them now. “I will not rest until I have had vengeance,” he cried.

Hawk got up to stand near him. He put a heavy hand on Jairen's shoulder. “Be calm now, lad. A true and noble warrior does not kill for vengeance.”

Jairen whirled. “What are you saying? How can I let my parents' murderers go free?”

“I did not say they should go free,” said Hawk. “I said that you must not seek vengeance. Justice must be served, and it will be. But we must not rush forward in anger. We must go forth instead with the knowledge that we fight for truth and for justice.”

Jairen felt a sudden sense of calm. “What you say is right and true,” he said slowly. “Somehow I know it from the bottom of my heart. I will continue my quest, and bring my parents' murderers to justice. And the sacrifice that Fez made in saving my life will not be wasted. This I vow.”

Hawk smiled and tightened his grip on Jairen's shoulder, drawing him close. “And I will be at your side,” he said. “It will be an honor to accompany such a warrior.”

Chapter Eighteen

They spent the night there, near the cliffs that had stolen Jairen's best friend. Hawk had insisted that they rest well, for the next part of the journey would be the hardest. Jairen slept between two Tyens, and their gentle purring was like a lullaby. He woke refreshed.

“How far are we from Gatekeeper Mountain now?” he asked Hawk as they sat near the fire planning that day's travel.

“Not far,” said Hawk. “If we were birds, we could be there by the time the sun sets this evening.”

“But we are not birds,” said Jairen. “How long will it take two humans and four Tyens to get there?”

“If all goes well,” answered Hawk, “we should arrive at the Talinlyre River within five days' time.”

“And if the traveling does *not* go well?” Jairen pressed him.

“If it does not go well, some of us may never arrive at all,” said Hawk flatly. He turned his head so as not to look at Jairen, and stirred the coals for a moment.

Jairen fell silent. He had come so far already, and now he was determined to finish his quest. It was a matter of honor. There could be no turning back.

“Let's begin, then,” he said, standing and stretching. He picked up his bundle and his sword, and prepared to set off down the path.

They walked that day across an arid plain, with no trees for shade or streams for water. Jairen's throat was parched by midmorning, and by noon he had shed most of his clothing.

They did not stop at midday — there was no point in sitting there in the blazing sun. As the day wore on, Jairen's step became slower and slower. The more the blazing sun beat down, the more his spirits sank. It seemed as though they had always been on this plain, and always would be.

Finally, Jairen stumbled and fell. He lay exhausted on the hot,

dry sand, unable to make himself get up and walk. Hawk tried to convince him to keep going, but Jairen didn't even hear his words. He lay panting, begging for a drink of water.

Then he felt himself being lifted gently, and carried. Without a word, the Tyens took turns bearing him across the plain. Jairen relaxed and gave himself up to their care.

They moved slowly, careful not to jolt him, and Jairen found himself dozing and then jerking awake every so often. Then he lost all sense of time or place, feeling only the sun beating down as he was transported through the hot, shifting sands.

At one point he woke, thinking he heard Fez's laugh. He summoned all his remaining energy to lift his head and look. “Fez!” he cried, seeing his friend standing up ahead. “You're alive! I knew it.” Jairen struggled to get out of the Tyen's grasp, but the huge creature held him firmly.

“It's not Fez,” said Hawk into Jairen's ear. “It's just his image that you're seeing. The sands have that effect on men. Pay it no mind — it's no more than a dream.”

Jairen nodded. He was not convinced that Hawk spoke the truth, but he was too exhausted to argue. He shut his eyes and slept some more. When he woke, he was lying beneath a huge, shady tree. One of the Tyens was holding a cup of water to his lips.

“Another illusion?” he asked, before taking a sip. Then he bent his head and drank deeply. It was no illusion. They had made it across the plains. Jairen drank his fill, and then slept without dreaming until he was woken again.

“It's time,” said Hawk gently. “Are you ready?”

Jairen nodded and struggled to his feet. He looked around to get his bearings, and saw that they had entered the deepest, darkest forest he'd yet seen. And this forest was as wet as the plains had been dry.

Water dripped from the gigantic leaves that blocked out the sky above. Thick vines hung from the trees, festooned with huge flowers that gave off a suffocating scent. A mist hung in the air, as though there was so much moisture here that it could not all be absorbed.

At first the trek through the jungle seemed easy. The wetness

was a relief after the dry heat of the day before. But soon, Jairen felt drained of energy once more. The vegetation was so thick that they had to hack at it with their swords in order to get through, and there was no clear path. Hawk walked ahead, doing his best to clear the way. Jairen stumbled along behind him, wishing that the journey was over.

“If not for these tall trees,” said Hawk, “you would be able to see Gatekeeper itself from here.” Jairen nodded, but did not smile. What good did it do to know that? Gatekeeper might as well be thousands of miles away, for all that he cared. For now, he wanted nothing more than to get out of this suffocating jungle.

Suddenly, Hawk stopped short, and Jairen bumped into him from behind. The Tyens drew closer, and everyone followed Hawk's gaze. “Oh, no!” said Jairen. “How will we ever cross?”

He was looking down into a deep gorge — not as deep as the one Fez had fallen into, but still deep enough to bring their journey to a halt. A slow, muddy river flowed at the bottom of the gorge, and thick climbing vines lined its sides.

“There was once a hanging bridge here,” said Hawk. “It must have been destroyed by the enemy.” He laid down his weapons and turned back into the jungle, emerging a few minutes later with a handful of long vines he'd pulled down. “Help me braid these into a strong rope,” he said to Jairen. “We can't be stopped now, by the lack of a bridge.”

Jairen bent to help him. When the rope was finished, Hawk attached it to a claw-like weapon he carried at his belt. Then he gave a mighty heave and tossed it to the other side, twitching it until the claw caught on a tree. He gave it a few hard tugs, and deemed it strong enough to hold their weight.

“Who's first?” he asked.

“I'll go!” said Jairen quickly. He was ashamed of how weak he'd seemed on this part of the journey. Pushing his long-sword securely into his belt, he grasped the rope in both hands and began the long trip across the gorge. Hand over hand he went, swinging helplessly from side to side but never losing his grip.

The rope hung low with his weight, but Jairen trusted Hawk's work, and knew it would not break. At last, he reached the other

side and jumped onto solid ground. He gave a whoop and signaled to the others that the way was safe.

When they were all on the other side, they decided to make camp and rest for a time before continuing through the jungle. Once again, Jairen slept soundly, though this time he dreamed all through the night. He dreamed of the great hall of kings, and of Gatekeeper Mountain. He dreamed of his journey ending—but he could never quite see, in his dreams, the face of the king he was seeking.

When they emerged from the jungle at the end of two more days, Jairen was astounded to see a long range of the tallest mountains he'd ever seen. Their peaks were covered in snow, and clouds drifted by their middles.

“Which one is Gatekeeper?” he asked Hawk breathlessly.

“None of those,” answered Hawk. “Those are only foothills, compared to Gatekeeper. Look past them, and tell me what you see.”

Jairen strained his eyes, and then gasped. There it was—Gatekeeper. It loomed in the distance, dwarfing the other mountains as a dragon dwarfs a tiny lizard.

“Must we climb all the others to get to it?” he asked. He couldn't imagine how long that would take.

“No,” said Hawk. “We'll take Tahketh's Pass. That is the ancient way, and it's a good way. We'll be at the river by sundown tomorrow.”

Game Hint

You need the Staff to defeat the Warlock king. Use the blade on the staff, then use the orb on the staff.

Chapter Nineteen

Hawk was right. Just as the sun began to set the next day, Jairen stood at the edge of the wide and shining Talinlyre River. Across the river he saw an open plain, not as desolate as the one they had just traveled over, but still quite bare. And rising from the plain was the mighty mountain Gatekeeper. Jairen stood looking at it, overwhelmed by its size and beauty.

“It's a wondrous sight, isn't it?” Hawk asked. He stood next to Jairen, drinking in the view.

“It is,” said Jairen. “But there's something that bothers me. I still don't know why I traveled to this spot — or what I should do now that I am here.”

“For now,” said Hawk, “I think you should get some rest. And soon enough, I assure you, you'll know why you're here and what to do!”

Jairen nodded sleepily and turned to help make camp for the night. And though he thought he would be too excited to sleep, he slept deeply and well. His dreams were peaceful ones; when he woke he remembered little about them except that he had “seen” his parents, which always made him feel good.

There was a morning mist hanging thick over the river, but Hawk and the Tyens, after a short conference, decided not to wait for it to lift. Instead, they all gave their weapons a quick going-over and then set off across the long, swaying bridge that spanned the Talinlyre.

“Be prepared, lad,” said Hawk, gripping Jairen's shoulder as he walked beside him. “The Lord of the Death Wraiths is not likely to let us near Gatekeeper without some kind of a fight.”

“I've not had too much trouble with any of the creatures he's sent to me so far,” answered Jairen. He felt confident and strong, sure of his battle skills and of his magic-making powers as well. He had grown quite a bit over the course of his journey, and the muscles in his arms and legs had grown and strengthened as well.

“Still,” said Hawk. “Be prepared.”

Jairen nodded. But no warning could have truly prepared him for what he saw when they came to the other side of the bridge. The fog was lifting now, leaving wisps of haze drifting here and there. And as the mist blew away, the Warlock King's evil army was revealed.

The plain that led to Gatekeeper Mountain, the plain that had last night been empty and almost bare, was teeming with creatures. There were hundreds of orcs, and thousands of goblins in their filthy leather armor. There were heavily armed trolls, looming above their comrades. Changelings slithered through the crowd, not bothering to hide their true, lizardlike form. Huge black Death Wraiths flew above the crowd, casting great dark shadows on the plain below. And, circling higher, harpies soared, their claws bared and ready to draw blood.

Hawk drew in a sharp breath. “Even I was not prepared for *this*,” he said. “Even the Death Wraiths have come to greet us — and they hate the daylight hours.”

Jairen looked more closely at the wraiths that circled in the sky. They were like humans in form, but they had no faces. Each had only two burning red orbs where their eyes should be. They wore black armor from head to foot. Jairen felt a chill wash over him as he watched them circle closer. These creatures were the embodiment of true evil.

And then Jairen saw something that made the rest of the horrible creatures on the plain look like friendly playmates. Standing at the back of the evil army was an enormous figure, cloaked in tattered black. Beneath the cloak his body was covered in armor — also black. In fact, the only color to be seen on the Lord of the Death Wraiths — for that was who he was—was the hot crimson of his eyes, which burned with fury. He held an immense broadsword aloft as he bellowed orders to his soldiers.

“Soul Slayer,” whispered Hawk, as if to himself. “The sword that will kill any who touch it. I would love to do battle with the evil one, but it is no use. Only one who is of royal blood can kill him.” He turned to Jairen. “Are you ready to do battle?” he asked.

“I am ready!” answered Jairen, his eyes shining. It did not seem to matter that they were so greatly outnumbered. He did not stop to think about the fact that two humans and four Tyens could

hardly begin to make a dent in the forces that faced them. He saw only Gatekeeper, looming above the plain, and he knew that he must find his way to the mountain, no matter how he did it.

Hawk led the charge with a wild battle cry, and Jairen and the Tyens followed him at a run, straight into the midst of the enemy. The noise was terrible. Shrieks and screams and shouts rang out, and huge talking drums beat in the background as the goblins called more of their own to come to battle.

Jairen swung his sword with power and strength, chopping his way through the crowd and doing as much damage as he knew how. He felt invincible, mighty. Hawk was at his side, urging him on. The Tyens protected their backs, beating off attackers before they could get close.

Goblins fell with ear-piercing shrieks, and orcs landed on top of them, bleeding black blood. Harpies whirled and dove, but Jairen thrust his sword and caught them before they could claw at his eyes. Even the Death Wraiths fell before Hawk's swinging scimitars.

But soon the tide began to turn. There were just so many of the evil creatures, and they attacked in waves. Jairen stood still finally, unable to continue his advance. “We're outnumbered!” he shouted to Hawk. “It's no use!” And then there was a mighty crash, and a bolt of lightning struck the ground, toppling a group of goblins. At nearly the same time, a rain of arrows fell from the sky, slaying all that were caught in its lethal downpour.

“It's Lakmir!” shouted Jairen. “He's come, and he's brought the elves with him! Hooray!” But there was no time to pause and greet them, as the battle was growing more intense by the minute. Jairen held his ground, fighting off all who came near him. He invoked every spell he remembered, adding his magic to Lakmir's. Wild winds raged over the battlefield, and rain drenched those who fought. Balls of fire flew, exploding with fury as they reached their targets.

But still, they were outnumbered. Jairen felt himself tiring again, until he was barely able to summon the energy to lift his sword. And then he heard the sounding of a horn, clear and true above the noise of battle. He turned his head this way and that, trying to find its source, but he could not see where the sound

came from. Suddenly, he heard a voice.

“Keep fighting, friend. Why do you stand there gaping, with your mouth open?”

“Fez?” Jairen asked. It was his friend's voice, there was no doubting it. He must be delirious. Fez was dead! But the voice spurred him on, and he fought with new strength.

“That's better!” said the voice. This time, Jairen whirled quickly, and almost fell to his knees when he saw Fez at his side. Little Fez, holding a golden trumpet.

“You — you're alive!” said Jairen.

“Alive and well,” answered Fez. “And I've brought the dwarfs. Watch!” He blew the horn, and a wave of well-armed dwarfs came over the hill, waving their axes. “Thought I fell into the chasm, did you? Well, I was near death, but when I awoke, I found myself on a narrow ledge. I managed to climb down and find the dwarves, and here I am.”

Jairen wanted to hug his friend. But there was no time. Just then, as Fez was swirled away by the force of battle, Jairen found himself alone and face-to-face with the awesome Lord of the Death Wraiths.

“You shall now meet your doom!” said the evil lord, in a hollow, booming voice. “The last king of Kal Torlin will be defeated and all Tyragon will be ours.”

“K-King?” asked Jairen. “Me?” But suddenly it all made sense. His vision, his quest — even his birthmark all made it clear. He had come to Gatekeeper Mountain to find the faceless king — and so he had. He was that king — and it had taken him all this time and travel to find it out. And then he remembered what Hawk had told him. Only one of royal blood could kill the Lord of the Death Wraiths — and that meant that it was all up to him.

Game Hint

To get the flute from the fountain,
use the gauntlet.

Chapter Twenty

Jairen stood facing the Lord of the Death Wraiths. The black-cloaked figure stood tall and silent, his hot scarlet eyes boring into Jairen's. And then, suddenly, the figure drew a huge sword from within the folds of his cloak.

“Soul Slayer!” said Jairen. And then he spoke proudly, facing the Lord of the Death Wraiths without fear. “My soul cannot be quenched with your evil weapon!” he cried. “Be on your guard.” His own sword flashed suddenly, and the figure leapt back, then came forward again, Soul Slayer gleaming with a cold blue light.

Now Jairen fought with more focus than ever before. Every swing of the sword, every spell he shouted was with the highest purpose possible: to rid the world of this evil creature.

The Lord of the Death Wraiths advanced, forcing Jairen back. He parried with his own weapon as Soul Slayer leapt and thrust, almost touching him as his enemy drew closer and closer.

“*Akei tu morbida!”* shouted Jairen, and a sudden high wind arose, driving his enemy back again. The Lord of the Death Wraiths responded with his own spell, invoking a rainlike cold, sharp arrows that drove into Jairen's eyes, blinding him.

Jairen thought fast, “*Silbain wiccu!”* he cried. Fireballs leapt from his left hand as he continued thrusting with his right, the one that held his sword.

The Lord of the Death Wraiths answered with bolts of lightning, hurled so fast that Jairen barely had a chance to duck.

The rest of the battlefield had grown quiet as warriors from both sided gathered to watch the tremendous struggle between Jairen and The Lord of the Death Wraiths. The only sounds were the clashing of steel on steel and the gasping breaths of the two bitter enemies.

Suddenly, Jairen scored a hit with his sword. Not a death blow, but a glancing cut that drew blood from his foe's cheek. The Lord of the Death Wraiths was enraged.

He drew himself up to his full, imposing height, flashed his

crimson eyes, and bellowed, “I will kill you as I did your parents!” He charged Jairen, swinging his enormous sword high above his head.

But Jairen stood firm. His enemy's taunt was just the fuel that his tired body needed. He fought with renewed vigor, hatred gleaming from his eyes. “You who orphaned me must die to pay for the blood of my parents!” he shouted, thrusting back twice for every thrust of the Lord of the Death Wraiths' sword.

But his anger — and his need for vengeance — clouded his judgement, and his blows glanced off the evil lord's armor. His enemy's advance continued.

And then it was as if Jairen heard a voice. The voice of Hawk, whispering in his ear. “A true and noble warrior does not kill for vengeance,” said the voice. “You must fight for truth and justice.”

Jairen drew in a deep breath. A feeling of strength flooded through him, and with it, a rush of memories filled his mind. He lifted his sword high.

“This is for my parents!” he shouted, bringing the sword around and thrusting hard. The lord tried to block it, but fell back from the strength of Jairen's blow.

“And this if for my friends,” Jairen shouted again, thrusting once more. Again, the lord could not move quickly enough to fully block the blow. The dark figure staggered.

“And this for the villagers,” Jairen bellowed, thrusting again. The lord fell to his knees.

“And this,” said Jairen, now speaking in a whisper, “this is for me, K'lynn T'ar, the Seed of Prophecy — and I am Justice!” Jairen's sword crashed down, trailing blue light. It sliced through Soul Slayer and through the Lord of the Death Wraiths' dark armor.

The huge body shook once, twice. The dark form moved with effort, trying to rise. The eyes flashed red as the massive hand reached out to find the broken sword.

Jairen stood back, watching. Hed he dealt the final blow?

His enemy shuddered, then collapsed and was still. A cloud of black smoke drifted slowly upward from the motionless body.

The watching armies fell back in awe. Their lord was dead. A

murmur went through the crowd — and then rose to a wail as the evil hordes began to run, shrieking. They were chased by bands of elves and dwarves until they had dispersed into the mountains beyond.

Epilogue

Fez ran to where Jairen stood, sword hanging at his side, “My King!” he cried, kneeling in front of him.

“Oh Fez, don't be silly,” said Jairen. But then he saw that Hawk knelt too, and the Tyens, and all the dwarves and elves. Only Lakmir still stood.

“Please, all of you,” Jairen said, “stand, and let us celebrate as friends, not as King and subjects. Together we have banished all evil from Tyragon, and our world will be peaceful once more.”

“Hooray!” shouted the dwarves, standing and throwing their caps into the air.

The elves began to sing, composing the tale of the battle on the spot.

The Tyens roared with pleasure, purring and rubbing up against Jairen as though they were house cats. And Hawk smiled quietly, unable to hide his pride in Jairen.

“What shall we have for the celebration supper?” asked Fez, and everybody laughed.

“Trust a fenling to think of that!” said Jairen, hugging his friend close.

Lakmir hung back, standing in the background with his face turned to the sky. Jairen followed his gaze and saw a black cloud beginning to form, covering the stars that now shone brightly in the dark sky above. “Don't worry, Lakmir!” he cried happily. “Together we can banish any rain that dares to fall on our feast.”

“It's not rain that I fear,” said Lakmir, still watching the cloud.

“What, then?” asked Jairen. But before Lakmir could answer, Jairen saw for himself. The cloud shifted and changed, taking shape slowly at first and then with more speed until the image of a face became clear. It was a strong and terrible face, and all of those gathered on the plain fell silent as soon as they saw it.

“The Warlock Lord,” said Jairen to himself. “How could I have forgotten —”

But he was interrupted by a voice, a voice that boomed like the loudest thunder. “You have beaten my most powerful warrior,” it said slowly. “And you have won the battle. But it is of no matter to me!” Then it gave a terrible laugh, and Jairen found that he was shaking.

The voice went on. “It is destined that we will meet again, and when we do, I shall be the victor!” It laughed again, and then it spoke no more. The cloud moved away, and the stars shone brightly again.

Jairen stood quietly among his friends — now his loyal subjects. The King of Kal Torlin let his sword drop to his side as he shook his head in sadness. Would he ever rid his land of evil?

Suddenly, Fez gasped and pointed at the sky. “Look,” he said. “An omen.” Everyone looked up, following his finger. The moons of Tyragon had risen — but there was something new in the way they appeared. For the first time, the moon Traal was full.

“This sign shall tell the world that the new king has come to power,” said Lakmir, “and the evil that has riddled this planet shall soon be banished.” The crowd gazed quietly at the heavens.

Jairen stared up at the sky. His birthmark seemed to glow in the silvery light as he proudly turned his full face to meet the full face of the fifth moon. Never again would he feel shame at the mark of Traal.

Dear Reader,

I hope you liked reading *Before Shadowgate*. Here is a list of some other books that I thought you might like:

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by William Goldman

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